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Ned Hazel, The Boy Trapper; OR, The Phantom Princess.

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AUTHOR OF "OREGON SOL," "GLASS EYE," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A "CONDEMNED DIFFIKILTY."

"HERE I am in a condemned diffikilty ag'in," muttered Nick Whiffles, as he seated himself on a broad, flat rock, on the bank of the Elk river, far up in Oregon, close to the boundary line between that then wild territory and British America.

The eccentric old trapper had spent many years in roaming through the vast solitudes of the North-west, sometimes in the service of the Hudson's Bay Company, and sometimes in the employ of the North-west Fur Company, but perhaps more frequently entirely alone. A man of his peculiar temperament and tastes was sure to be widely known, both at the far-scattered trading-posts and among the numerous trappers and hunters that wandered through the vast wilderness, which, at that comparatively recent day, knew scarcely any thing of the advantages of civilization.

As was the invariable custom of Nick, when in a quandary, he relieved himself by self-communing.

"The Whiffles family was always noted for the way they had of getting into diffikilty. The first thing I remember was getting spanked on account of some condemned diffikilty that I had got into with my mother, and the next thing was the measles and whooping-cough, and then when I got fairly over them and a dozen other diseases, our house took fire and burned down, and about the time the old gent got it rebuilt, it took fire and burned down ag'in. Wal, he didn't say nothin', but when the cabin went the third time, he got mad and said that thing was getting rather monotonous, and he would like, by way of variety, to see it shook down by an airthquake, or carried away by a hurricane; but of course none of them things happened.

"Then, when the old gentleman took his last sleep, and they come to read his will, we found the lawyer had my name down wrong; instead of being Nick Whiffles, Esq., it was Old Nick, so I didn't get the bequest at all, but then, as everything else had been willed away already, I didn't lose much after all. My older brother got the house, but, afore he could move into it, there came a big freshet that carried it down-stream, and that was the last of that.

"There was no end to my diffikilties. When I got to be a young man, I spent a whole summer's earnings in buying a suit of clothes. I had got to be a little tender on a cross-eyed girl that lived about a half-mile off, and, as soon as I could stow myself away in my new suit, I started out to see her. She gave me a hint that she wa'n't particklerly anxious, as, when I went to go in the house, she set her dog on me, and the very first dash he made, he ripped out the whole seat of my pants and run away with it, so that there was no chance of putting the missing cloth back ag'in.

"Wal, Nick Whiffles has seen a good deal in the way of diffikilty since them days, but, somehow or other, the good Lord has brought him through all right, and, although I bear a good many scars, I'm yet sound in limb and wind, and able to eat my usual hunk of venison, follow the trail of an enemy, or run my eye along old Humbug here in a way that'll make her bite when she barks; and for all this I'm thankful."

The old trapper was silent a few moments, as if in deep reverie. Near by, his horse, known as Shagbark, was lazily cropping the grass in a way that showed he was in no famishing condition, to say the least.

At the feet of Nick Whiffles flowed the Elk river, quiet and unruffled by the slightest ripple of wind. On the other side, and as far as the eye could reach, stretched the Oregon woods. There were woods on every hand, and far off in the distance could be seen the white peaks of the Rocky Mountains, their tops covered with the snow of centuries.

It was one vast solitude, such as it had stood at "creation's morn," and looking upon the figure of the trapper as he half-sat and half-reclined upon the stone, it would have been easy to imagine him some statue cut from the rock itself.

But, as Nick remarked, at the opening of our story, he was in a "condemned diffikilty"—nothing very serious, it is true, but enough to cause him some annoyance, and to occasion him considerable communing with himself.

Three days before, he had crossed the line into British America, and was making his way toward the Saskatchewan, when he turned out of his path, somewhat, to call at Fort Wilbur to see some of his old friends, when he learned that the brigade of the Oregon Department of the Hudson Bay Company was expected in within a week; it had divided up into several companies, and two of the canoes were on their way down the Elk river, for the purpose of bartering for a valuable lot of furs and peltries that were known to be in the possession of a party of Blackfeet, whose village was on the northern bank of the stream. The traders expected to obtain Nick Whiffles to act as a sort of "go-between" in the business, as he stood on good terms with these treacherous people, and his universally known and respected probity could not fail to make him a valuable man to both parties in the business.

Nick had acted in this capacity before, so that now when the wishes of the trappers were made known to



NED HAZEL, THE BOY TRAPPER.

him, he felt under a sort of obligation to accept, and he turned the head of his horse, Shagbark, toward the south, and, accompanied by his sagacious dog, Calamity, made the best possible time for Elk river again.

The particular "diffikilty" to which he referred was this: His cabin was about twenty miles away from where he now found him, and there he had a young *protege* of his—a bright-eyed boy known as Ned Hazel, a sort of waif of the woods, that had come into his hands, in a singular manner, a number of years before, when he was little more than a mere child. He had been left at the "cottage," with the understanding that his adopted "father" was not expected to return under three weeks, and now he was back again at the end of that number of days. He was anxious to take the little fellow on this short excursion, and had stopped at his house in the hope of finding him, but he was off on a hunt of his own, and Nick, not daring to wait, had hurried off for Elk river, where he now found him.

But where was the brigade? Above him or below him? That was the question for him to decide, and having no data by which to make his calculation, he set it down as a "condemned diffikilty."

He had sent Calamity a half-mile up the river to watch and to report to him the first appearance of the brigade, while he enjoyed the uncomfortable sensation of knowing that, as likely as not, the party for whom he was waiting might be drawing further away from him each moment.

"There's a company of them Nor'-westers somewhere in this neighborhood, and if they happen to run ag'in' the brigade, there'll be the condemnedest diffikilty ever heard tell on. Hello! what's up, Shagbark?"

His horse had suddenly ceased eating, and, raising his head, with the grass unchewed in his mouth, gave a whinny, clearly indicating that some one or something was approaching.

"What is it?" asked Nick, instantly becoming all vigilance himself.

The horse held his head motionless for a moment, and then resumed his cropping the grass as unconsciously as before.

Nick Whiffles smiled.

"That means it's Calamity coming. You critters understand each other about as well as I understand you both."

The words were yet in his mouth, when the huge dog that had been the companion of Whiffles in so many exciting incidents of his life burst through the undergrowth and signified his pleasure by whining, wagging, and licking the hand of his master. The latter patted his head with no less delight.

"What is it, Calamity, for I know by your ways that there's something coming down the river? Is it the brigade or some other sort of animile?"

How, or by what means, Nick got at the meaning of the dog, it would be impossible for us, an "outsider," to say, but it required only a few moments for him to learn that it was not the brigade, but a single canoe descending the river.

"That much being sartin," said Nick, "the diffikilty is as to *who* handles the paddle; like enough some murderous Blackfoot; but," he added, with some hesitation, as he narrowly scrutinized the actions of his dog, "the animile don't act in that way. He seems to have a better opinion of the chap than me."

As it was impossible to gather the full meaning of Calamity, Nick could only cast his eye up the river, and wait for the mystery to solve itself.

He was not left long in waiting. Around the curve in the river, just above him, a small canoe suddenly shot to view, in which was seated a small boy, dressed as a hunter, and using the long ashen paddle with no slight skill.

The eyes of Nick Whiffles sparkled as he recognized the lad, and he rose and waved his hand as a signal.

"Bless the soul of little Ned; his own father couldn't love him any more than I do."

The water splashed and flashed in the sunlight, as the lad sent his little boat skimming over the surface of the water. A few moments only were needed for the prow of the canoe to strike the gravel at the feet of the hunter, who advanced to the water's edge to greet his pet.

"Give me your hand, lad, and tell me whether you have seen anything of the brigade?"

"Nothing, uncle Nick."

"I was afraid you hadn't; then I'm afraid we're in a condemned diffikilty."

CHAPTER II.

THE HUDSON BAY MEN.

AN observer would not have failed to be struck with the contrast of appearance between Nick Whiffles and the boy with whom he was conversing.

The hunter was bronzed, scarred and toughened by the torrid heat of summer and the Arctic coldness of the tempests that during the winter months sweep over the plains and mountains of the North-west. His face was shaggy with its untrimmed grizzled beard, and his hair, that escaped from beneath his coon-skin cap, was silvered by the same hand that spares none of us. There was immense strength in those long, muscular limbs, and although Nick generally moved with a slow, shuffling gait, he was capable of astonishing quickness and celerity of movement when necessary.

Ned Hazel, as he was called, was about fifteen years of age, rather slight for that number of years, with eyes as bright, and cheeks as delicately ruddy, as if he had been born and reared in the palace of some noble in sunny France.

His movements were all grace, and underneath the delicacy of feature and color was the grand basis of rugged health that had already triumphed over obstacles under which many a man would have succumbed. There was no doubting that the deep affection of Nick Whiffles was fully reciprocated by Ned, whose lustrous eyes glowed with a bright light when he looked the grizzled old hunter in the face.

The boy began frolicking with the dog, while Nick turned his eyes up-stream, with an anxious expression of countenance that showed that his mental "diffikilty" was far from being purely imaginary. Suddenly he turned to Ned.

"Were you looking for me, lad?"

"That was what brought me here."

"And what reason had you to think me here, when you see'd me start for Fort Wilbur?"

"Why, uncle Nick," replied Ned, pausing in his gambols with Calamity, "you hadn't been gone a half-day when I happened to think it was just the time last year when you went down the river with the brigade, and I knew you expected to do the same this spring; so I was sure you had forgot it. But you was so far away that there was no use in my trying to overtake you, and I thought perhaps you would think of it and come back yourself. Sure enough, when I came back, I found signs in the cabin that told me you had been there. I understood what it meant, so I made for the river, and jumping into the canoe, here I am—"

"If I only knowed— Hark!" suddenly exclaimed Whiffles, his face lighting up, while he assumed an attitude of attention. "Did you hear nothing then, yonker?"

"Yes; it is the brigade," replied Ned, also intently listening. "Yes; it's the brigade," he quickly added; "just hear them!"

Through the quiet air, mellowed and softened by the intervening distance, came the sound of male voices singing in time with the regular sweep of their paddles. There was a profundity of tone, and an impressive melody in the blending of the score and more of voices that struck the ears of both Nick and the boy.

"I've heard that same thing many a time before," muttered the hunter, more to himself than to his companion, "and it allers makes me feel all-overish. Three years ago, when I was on the Saskatchewan, I was asleep one night, in my canoe, when I awoke and heard the brigade about a mile up the river, where they were encamped, sing. I listened awhile till they started off on the identical hymn that I used to hear sung when I was a boy. Wal, 'fore I knowed it, the tears were running down my cheeks, and I was in the little village church at home, with my old gray-haired mother and father, the choir singing that same hymn. 'Wal, wal, what's the use?'"

He drew his hand across his eyes, as though some mist obscured his vision, and, with a great sigh, turned his back upon the past and looked up the river—into the future.

Two large boats, or canoes, a moment later, glided to view, the melody swelling out with a full volume, as it was free from all intervening obstruction, and floated over the smooth face of the river.

Each canoe was capable of holding twenty-five or thirty men, but at present there were little over twenty in the entire party. They were after furs and peltries, and took with them a good working crew and no more.

A few moments after they appeared, Nick Whiffles stepped to the edge of the stream and motioned with his hand for them to approach. He was recognized at once, and both canoes

instantly headed toward shore. The inmates showed no intention of landing, but the foremost rounded to for him and Ned to step aboard.

"We yield you the place of honor," said a round-faced, Scotch-looking gentleman, whom Dick recognized as William Mackintosh, a leading man in the employ of the Hudson Bay Company. "There is room for your boy and your dog. I don't suppose you want to take your horse along?"

"No; I will leave Shagbark here."

"Suppose he wanders away?"

"He knows better than to go very far; and he and Calamity understand each other so well that they're sure to find each other out. Come, dog, in with you, and lad, do you follow."

Calamity sprang lightly into the front of the canoe, while the boy leaped, as nimbly as a fawn, after him. Then the old hunter followed, with more deliberation and dignity. As he glanced over the crews, he identified quite a number, and nodded good-naturedly to them. But no other salutation passed between them, they attending strictly to business, leaving their director, Mr. Mackintosh, to play the part of host.

The latter chatted pleasantly with Nick, but all the time he nervously scanned the lad, who sat playing with the dog, and occasionally glancing at the shore as they glided by.

"Nick," said Mr. Mackintosh, after a while, "I had heard that you had a boy, but I never saw him before. He doesn't resemble you a bit."

"And why should he?"

"I believe you can always detect a likeness between father and son, and I've been studying for the last ten minutes to see where it is between you and him, but it isn't there at all."

"I never was married, and consequently I never had a son. He is no more a relation of mine than you are."

"Ah! who is he?"

"Ned Hazel."

"I know, but where did he come from, and how is it that he is in this part of the world?"

Nick seemed on the point of replying to this question in full, when he suddenly checked himself.

"If it's all the same to you, Mr. Mackintosh, we won't talk about that thing. You understand?"

The Scotchman did understand, and showed his good breeding by skillfully turning the conversation upon business matters.

"We shan't make the Indian village to-night, I'm afraid, Nick?"

The hunter turned his head, and scrutinized the shore, a moment, so as to make sure of his location before answering.

"No; but there is going to be a full moon, and you can go a good distance; you orter try and hit it near daylight."

"Can we do it by rowing an hour or two this evening?"

"Yes; powerful easy."

"Then it shall be done; we can make a good dozen miles before night."

"Yes; as we've got the current with us."

"You haven't seen any of the Nor'-westers, have you?"

"Not lately; but there's a party of 'em somewhere in the country. I've run ag'in' signs of 'em, and then I've heard of 'em through some of the red-skins."

"I hope they won't get down to the Black-foot village ahead of us, for we count on making a good haul there."

"I don't think there's any likelihood of that, but some of them chaps ar' as cunnin' as foxes."

"I hope, too, that our party will not encounter them."

As Mackintosh added these words, it was with a seriousness which showed that he was earnest in the wish which he had expressed.

CHAPTER III.

THE PHANTOM PRINCESS.

JUST as the shades of night began settling over Elk river and the adjoining wilderness, the brigade (as it was improperly termed) turned the heads of their canoes toward shore, and landed at a point where there was a sort of natural clearing in front of a dense wood.

Here the fine discipline of the party was made manifest. A certain number at once busied themselves in gathering wood for fuel, others brought forth the provisions, which they always carried with them, while every one seemed to have some particular duty to perform, and to understand what it was without any direction from the leader of the party.

The Hudson Bay Company, although trading through its agents, with friendly Indians, still

had occasional difficulty with some of the tribes within their territory. When they penetrated into the Oregon department, they generally went prepared for any emergency, and the caution that distinguished all their movements showed that they were not without apprehensions regarding their safety.

Two of their members, therefore, took upon themselves to act the part of scouts, while Nick Whiffles, for the satisfaction of himself and Mackintosh, started out to reconnoiter the country that immediately surrounded them. He went entirely alone—that is, with no companion except his inseparable friend Calamity.

Mackintosh waited until certain that the trapper was fairly out of the camp, and then, while his men were busy at their respective duties, he turned to the lad and invited him to seat himself upon the blanket at his side. The boy obeyed cheerfully, but showed in his manner that he had some curiosity to know what it all meant.

The Scotchman had made up his mind to do a thing about which he had some compunctions of conscience, that is, he intended to question the boy without the knowledge of Nick Whiffles.

At the same time, he wished to do nothing in itself wrong. Doubtful whether the lad knew the precise nature of the relationship existing between him and the eccentric trapper, he determined carefully to avoid enlightening him in that respect.

Speaking in the most matter-of-fact manner, he said:

"Your name is Ned, I believe?"

"Yes; Ned Hazel."

"Not Ned Whiffles, eh?"

"No, no; Nick is not my father; only my uncle."

That point settled, the interlocutor felt the way more clear.

"How do you like this sort of life?"

"Very well."

The manner in which this reply was made proved that the lad, to say the least, was not perfectly satisfied.

"This out-door rugged life is certainly very healthy. I presume you do not know of such a thing as sickness by experience?"

"No, sir," was the respectful reply.

"You talk like a boy of some education. Do you know how to read?"

"Oh! yes; Nick can read a little, and he brought me some books from the forts that I have studied; but then, I don't know much," naively added Ned, with a smile.

"You are about fifteen years of age, I should judge."

"That's it, exactly."

"A boy who has spent all his life in the woods isn't apt to acquire as much as you have done."

This was a feeler thrown out with an object, and it accomplished its purpose.

"But I haven't always lived in the woods."

"Ah! how is that?"

"Didn't Ned tell you that he found me in a canoe, drifting down the river, and he picked me up, and hunted a week for my owners, and never learned a thing about me? If he didn't tell you, that's the way it was. He took me to his cabin, and I've lived with him ever since, until we love each other just as though he were really my father."

"Why, you have quite a romantic history," said Mackintosh, skillfully concealing his curiosity from the youth. "Do you recollect that trip down the river at such an early age?"

"Sometimes I think I can, but I ain't sure. I was very young then, and dressed in baby-clothes."

"What became of those clothes?"

"All lost, I suppose, long ago, as I've never seen them."

"They ought to have been kept, as they might have afforded some clew to your identity in after years."

"Neither Nick nor I care about learning anything more about me."

"Do you have any recollection of anything that happened before Nick found you? You know that persons can sometimes remember things far back in their childhood."

The boy was silent a moment before answering.

"Sometimes I remember a little—only a little."

"Let me ask you to describe your remembrances?"

"It's hard to do; they come to me in dreams sometimes. Then, when I hear men singing away off, it reminds me of something I have heard very much like it, away back, when I was very small; and then sometimes, when I am stretched out on my back in the woods, looking up

through the trees at the clouds, I can remember that I once have seen tall houses, standing close together, and a great many people walking before them—"

"That shows you have been in a city," interrupted the Scotchman.

"There be some pictures of such places in my books, and I know I've seen them somewhere."

"Can you remember any figures or faces?"

"I can remember a woman's face that used to bend over me."

"How did it look?"

"Oh! so beautiful! like an angel's."

"You can't describe it?"

"No one could—sometimes I think it must have been the *Phantom Princess*."

"The *Phantom Princess*!" repeated Mackintosh, in amazement. "What do you mean by that? Who is she?"

"Haven't you heard of her? But here comes Nick; he'll tell you all about her, for he knows her."

The Scotchman started, and hastily said, in an undertone:

"Oblige me by saying nothing to Nick about the questions I have asked you, and leave me to find out for myself all about the *Phantom Princess*."

Ned looked somewhat surprised, at this request, but he nodded, as he rose to his feet, to signify that the request should be respected.

Nick Whiffles seemed entirely unsuspecting of the interview, and came up in his usual cheery humor.

"Me and Calamity have made a sarcofagus," said he, "and we can't find any sign of a red-skin near. I'm glad your feed is ready, for I'm as hungry as my grandfather was in England, when he chawed up the Prince of Wales, and chased his father into his palace. The Whiffles family was always noted for their eatin' perclivities; my grandmother used to amuse herself by settin' on the scales and eatin' biled chickens till their heads that were chopped off would outbalance her, and then she throwed away the bones, so that they didn't count."

"You are no great eater yourself, Nick?"

"Oh! mighty! no!" sighed the trapper; "I was such a small eater that I was considered a disgrace to the family, and was turned out on that account. My grandfather fit in the Revolutionary War, and when he retired on a pension, he got five hundred a year, which he laid out one month in Bologna sausages and salt mackerel, and then bein' as he hadn't any more to live on, he pined away and died, afore he could get his pension increased."

The supper being ready, the trappers gathered, in several groups, and sitting down tailor-fashion, fell to with the vim and vigor of men who were in the enjoyment of perfect health and digestion.

Nick Whiffles, Ned, and Mackintosh ate in a group by themselves, while all were so occupied with their employment that scarcely a word was exchanged except in the way of request for food.

It was a singular scene. The somber forests in the back-ground, the broad, smooth-flowing river throwing back the yellow light of the immense, roaring camp-fire, and two large canoes resting against the bank, and the figures of the men engaged in eating.

The warm light of the blazing fagots was scarcely needed, as the full moon was now sailing above in an unclouded sky, and the view up and down Elk river was quite extended.

A full half-hour was occupied in the supper, at the termination of which the pipes were produced. With scarcely an exception, the mouths of the trappers began issuing such volumes of smoke as to make it seem that the entire party were wrapped in a misty cloud.

Mackintosh produced a case of cigars, inviting Nick to join him, but the hunter declined.

"It ain't often I smoke, but when I do, I don't care about chawing terbacker at the same time."

"And I never smoked or chewed at all," added Ned, whereupon the Scotchman replaced his case, with a word of commendation for the lad.

With the taking of their pipes by the trappers, their tongues seemed to be unloosed, and a perfect Babel of talk and chatter raged for a time. There was a fine flow of animal spirits upon the part of all, and many a jest and joke enlivened the intercourse around the camp-fire.

These were hardy men, toughened by the terrible winters of the North-west, by the tempestuous violence of the regions of the Saskatchewan and Mackenzie. They had tramped on snow-shoes along the coasts of Ungava and

James's bays, and over rivers where a dozen feet of solid ice intervened between them and the crystal waters beneath.

This was a sort of holiday to them. The unusually severe winter had ended and the spring had fairly set in. The ice had left the streams, and the deep blue of the sky indicated the approach of mild weather. There was a crisp coldness of the air, especially in the morning and evening, which made the warmth of camp-fire and blanket very agreeable.

But the weather was just the thing for active exertion and exercise, and it would not have been changed by any member of the party, had he been given the power to do so.

During the cold months that had just ended, the agents of the great fur companies of the North-west had been busy catching numerous fur-bearing animals of that territory. With the opening of spring, these were being gathered in, while others were making a tour among the Indians further south, to purchase all that could be procured of them.

An hour's rest, and the signal was given to start again.

Only a few minutes were required for every thing to be placed in the canoes, when they shoved out into stream. As before, the canoe of Mackintosh took the lead, Nick Whiffles sitting in the front, the Scotchman next, while Ned and Calamity took positions in the rear of them.

The long, sweeping paddles were dipped deep in the water, and the boats glided forward with that easy, swift motion which is seen when a vessel is under control of skillful oarsmen.

The round, full moon, shining in an unclouded sky, was directly overhead, so that the somber forests threw only a narrow strip of shadow along the shore.

The men did not sing, as was their usual custom when sweeping along in this manner, but their pull was steady and uniform as though they were keeping time with the motion of some "director" elevated above their heads.

The consciousness that they were in a territory with an air of hostility about it, was the cause of this. When there was no certainty but what the crack of a hostile rifle might be heard at any moment, there was no disposition on the part of the men to make their location known to any lurking foe.

All seemed impressed with the solemnity of the scene, and Nick Whiffles and Mackintosh conversed only at intervals, and then in tones so low that no one else comprehended the words uttered. Even Ned, with his arm thrown affectionately over Calamity, appeared lost in meditation. Perhaps the strange questioning of the Scotchman had again called up those shadowy imaginings of which he had spoken; perhaps his mind was running back to that vague period that preceded his falling into his hands; and he saw once more the tall houses, and the beautiful face bending over him, as he saw them in dreams and reveries, when alone upon his couch, or in the vast wilderness that had so long been his home.

Several miles were passed in this manner, and the surface of the Elk river was as smooth as a mirror, except where the swift-cutting canoes and the long, sweeping paddles rippled the water.

Suddenly Nick Whiffles felt some one grasp his arm, and turning, he encountered the pale face of Mackintosh, who, pointing ahead and down-stream, said, in an agitated whisper:

"Look yonder! What is that?"

Looking in the direction indicated, Nick saw what, without any effort of the imagination, might be termed a "spirit canoe."

Several hundred yards ahead was a small Indian canoe, in which was seated the figure of a woman apparently motionless. The boat and its occupant were both of a snowy-white color, and seemed to have risen from the bed of the river.

The crews of the two large boats had discerned it at the same moment, and, by one impulse, all stopped rowing, while they gazed in breathless amazement upon the scene.

What could it mean? Was it a warning from the spirit world? Was it a human being?

Had one or even two of these trappers, without any other companions, seen this vision, they would have fled in superstitious terror, as if from the presence of the Evil One himself; but with a score of hardy, brave men, they felt too much courage to flee in fear, although every member of the party was impressed with a strange, chilling sensation at the singular sight.

The fact that every living member of the company saw it distinctly and unmistakably, prevented anything like ridicule or jesting.

"Have you ever seen it before?" asked Mackintosh.

"Yes," replied Nick, gazing steadfastly at it.

"What is it?"

"The Phantom Princess!"

"What's that? I never heard of it until to-night."

"You know what the critter is, then, as well as I do."

"Have you ever spoken to it?"

"Yes—but it never answered; I've see'd it, but I never could get any nearer than we are now."

"There is a mystery about it, certainly," added Mackintosh, as if speaking to himself, and then turning about so as to face his men, he spoke in a creaky voice:

"Fall to, boys; if you can overtake that creature I'll divide fifty pounds between you, when we get back to the fort."

The courageous words of their leader acted like magnetism upon the trappers; their paddles were dipped by one impulse, and the two heavy canoes sped forward as if rowed by the great crew of the Tyne.

Mackintosh leaned forward and peered at the white canoe and its ghostly occupant.

"Do you think we can catch her?" he asked, in a whisper, of Nick.

"No," was the reply; "there ain't a human livin' that can do it."

"We can try it, at any rate."

"S'pose you do; if you go to put your arms about her, she'd go up in the air, and that would be the last of her."

"I am not as superstitious as you, Nick; I think she is real life and blood, and we are going to unravel a curious mystery."

At the end of ten minutes, it was plain that the "Phantom Princess" was as far away as when first discovered. Mackintosh spoke sharply to his men, and they bent every energy to the work; the water foamed at the prows, and the woods glided rapidly back, like the figures in a panorama. The trappers were toiling as they had never toiled before. What boat could keep pace with them?

"We must overhaul her, Nick!" he added, peering forward again; "we are gaining; I am sure of it—WHAT!"

"What did I tell you?"

The white canoe and the Phantom Princess had vanished.

CHAPTER IV.

THE NIGHT SPY.

AY! while Mackintosh and Nick Whiffles, and the men who were constantly glancing over their shoulders, were gazing at the mysterious canoe and its occupant, it had disappeared as a flash of sunlight is sometimes obscured by the passing shadow.

The Scotchman rubbed his eyes and looked again.

"It is gone, sure enough!" he muttered, as he sat down, disappointed, chagrined and the least bit frightened; "what has become of it, Nick?"

"I ain't acquainted with the kind of animiles called spirits," was the prompt reply. "I've tried chasing her afore, but what's the use?"

"I ain't prepared to believe in ghosts and such nonsense," was the stubborn reply. "For all that female has got out of the way in a style which I don't exactly understand, I am satisfied that she is real flesh and blood, and like enough some outlandish contrivance of the very Indians we are going to visit."

The men had been quick to detect the *faux pas*, and were now pulling with a steady, slow stroke, as if they were wearied with their exertion. Mackintosh permitted them to do this for sometime longer in the hope of seeing the Phantom Princess again; but, satisfied that her disappearance was for that night at least, he gave the orders to stop for the night.

Once more the prows were turned in shore, and the crew landed. The prows of the boats were pulled up the bank, the blankets taken out, and two huge fires kindled. Around these stretched the score or so of men, their feet toward the fire, and their heads outward. In a few moments, the only ones who were awake were the two acting as sentinels, and whose duty it was to keep the camp-fire burning brightly.

As was his invariable custom, when the two were traveling together, Nick Whiffles and Ned Hazel were enfolded in the same blanket. With their bodies so close that the warmth was mutual and reciprocal, the two passed off into sweet and refreshing slumber.

It was a strange and powerful tie of love that united the grizzled old trapper and the fair-haired, ruddy-cheeked boy, whose face and appearance proved him to be of no mean birth.

The unraveling of the mystery of the Phantom Princess, demands at this point that another personage should receive more particular notice. That personage is one of the men who is now acting as sentinel over the sleeping trappers.

His name is Hugh Bandman, an Englishman by birth, who has been in the employ of the Hudson Bay Company for something over ten years. He is pleasing in appearance, of rather a sad countenance; but there is none who stands higher for honesty, modest daring, and perfect trustworthiness in every respect. He was silent and rather uncommunicative, except now and then, but he was held in the highest respect by his associates. There was something connected with his early history, before he left England, known only to Mackintosh, which doubtless threw a shadow over his whole life, and had much to do with his burying himself from the civilized world in the wilds of British America.

He was in the boat containing the director of the brigade, and none rowed harder than he for the purpose of overtaking the Phantom Princess. It had been noticed by all those who were acquainted with him, that he always showed a peculiar zest in engaging in any enterprise or adventure that seemed to offer danger or curious experience.

To-night he was more moody than common. With his gun upon his shoulder, in the usual manner as a sentinel, he paced back and forth, looking down the river, as if in quest of the phantom that had caused him and his companions such wonderment an hour before.

After gathering enough wood to keep the camp-fires burning for some time to come, he said to his companion:

"You can keep watch a half-hour or more while I am gone."

His friend nodded to signify his willingness, and he at once moved away from the camp and disappeared in the gloomy depths of the surrounding woods.

In a brief time Hugh Bandman was making his way along the shore of Elk river, moving with the stealth of a Blackfoot Indian upon the trail of a foe. So silently indeed did he advance that he might have passed within an arm's length of the listening red-skins without his presence being discovered.

He did not pause until he reached a point about a quarter of a mile below the camp. Here the dense undergrowth came down to the very edge of the stream, and offered a most secure hiding-place even at noonday. Secreting himself in this cover, he prepared to watch the surface of the river, flowing so calmly beneath the radiance of the moon.

"I wonder if I am to see her again," he muttered, as he seated himself. "I thought I caught a glimpse of the boat awhile ago."

Looking to the right and left his view was quite extended up and down the river, but his sight failed to reveal anything, and he drew a deep sigh of disappointment.

"I can't stay here long. I would not have Mackintosh wake up and find me gone for all the world. He would be sure to suspect something."

Hark! his strained ear caught the sound of something like a faint ripple.

"That was a paddle, or an animal stepping into the water!" he whispered, as he leaned forward and looked up and down the river.

Gliding close along the inner shore, so as to be enfolded in the thin ribbon of shadow, he discerned the ghostly canoe and occupant.

It was moving slowly along, as though carried by the current alone, and, as he looked, he saw the same spirit-like figure of a female sitting in the stern, and a *second* form in the prow.

"There are two of them," he thought, as he gazed breathlessly at the sight; "we did not see them both before."

Still intently watching them, he saw that the figure in the forward part of the boat was much smaller and lighter than the other.

"Mother and daughter!" was the thought that instantly flashed into the mind of Bandman, as he fairly devoured them with his eyes.

A supernatural air was attaching to this curious scene hard to shake off; but the trapper was a practical man, and he would not believe that it was not material flesh and blood he saw before him.

"If they would only move or speak!" he murmured, seeking to shake off the oppressiveness that rested upon him.

They did not speak, but a movement was made. She who sat in the stern dipped a paddle into the water, and the same soft, rippling sound came to the ear of the trapper again.

"She's is a human being," he concluded, with

a sigh of satisfaction. "What will she do if I hail her?"

He was on the point of calling to her more than once, but restrained himself, from a conviction that the canoe and its occupants would vanish from sight as suddenly as it did when under the scrutiny of Mackintosh and Nick Whiffles.

So he stood still, watching, listening and wondering. He was in hopes that the boat would shoot out from the shadow, where he could gain a better view of it, but it remained where it was, but floating downward, until Hugh saw that he must move with it, if he expected to keep it under surveillance any longer.

He stepped carefully back, out of view of the river, and stealthily made his way a rod or two further down-stream. In his haste, he was conscious of making a light noise, but not enough, as he believed, to disturb any one.

But when he reached the stream, and looked expectantly out upon the water, the boat was gone!

Up, down, across, everywhere he looked, but it had indeed gone, and was to be seen nowhere.

"There is something supernatural in this!" he exclaimed, as he turned about and made his way back to the camp-fire, returning, as he had promised, within a half-hour of the time of his departure.

But no word escaped the lips of Hugh Bandman of what he had seen that night.

CHAPTER V.

KNIVES AND SKINS.

NATURALLY, the trappers, upon awakening the next morning, very freely discussed their singular experience of the preceding night.

The majority agreed that it was some Indian contrivance, although of what character, or what its purport was, no one undertook to conjecture even.

Nick Whiffles was thoughtful and reserved. He seemed like another person, devoid of his eccentric humor and geniality of spirits. When he was appealed to, he refused to make any satisfactory answer, and appeared unwilling to hold any conversation regarding it.

Mackintosh was the only one who seemed unaffected by the occurrence. He laughed and chatted with all, and when one or two ventured to rally him upon his disappointment, he replied:

"The thing ain't ended yet; I'm bound to get at the bottom of that mystery."

Again the two canoes put out in the river, and the long paddles of the trappers swept the boat forward with the same power and grace, but they still refrained from breaking out into their usual chorus and song.

They were now within the vicinity of the Blackfoot village, and were certain of coming upon Indians in a very short time.

Mackintosh and Nick Whiffles were conversing together about "business," when their canoe turned an abrupt bend in the stream, and they saw the town they were seeking, within a stone's throw.

A clearing, of several acres' extent, came down to the river, and on every other side were the dense, "continuous woods" of Oregon. Very nearly in the center of the clearing, and a hundred yards back from the stream, stood about twenty lodges, made of bark and skins, and of a character that showed they had been built with the purpose of withstanding the rigor of the winters in these latitudes.

The prow of the canoe had scarcely turned the bend, when such a Babel of shouts and halloas filled the air, that the trappers stopped rowing, and Mackintosh looked to Nick Whiffles for advice.

The old hunter smiled.

"That's the way the critters say *how do you do*."

"What shall we do? Go ahead?"

"Wait a minute."

With which he rose in the canoe so as to make himself visible, and then swinging his coon-skin cap over his head, called out to them in the Blackfoot tongue, that they were friends who had come to barter with them.

Nick was recognized before he spoke, and an instant hush fell upon all, so that his words were easily understood; one of their number called back that they were ready to trade, and invited them to come ashore.

Nick explained what was said to Mackintosh, and added:

"Put me ashore, but don't any of you folks land. I know these chaps and I'm afraid you'll git in trouble."

"But, suppose they offer you violence, do you

"suppose we are going to sit still and permit it?"

"I'll take care of myself. Ned, stay where you are; Calamity, come with me!"

As the prow of the canoe touched the land, Nick and his dog stepped ashore, the former turning around and adding a word:

"Keep your men together; don't let one of them land."

Mackintosh nodded his head to signify that he understood, and the old trapper moved away in the direction of the village.

As may be supposed, his movements were watched with the most acute interest by his friends, who were not without painful misgivings, as they saw the Blackfoot men, women, and children close around him, ere he had advanced half-way across the opening clearing.

"How easy they could hew him to pieces ere he could prevent it," thought Mackintosh, who was painfully excited.

But, Nick Whiffles was the picture of the coolness of self-possession. With his face cut across by his huge grin, he greeted the Indians, calling several by name, with a readiness which showed, indeed, that they were old acquaintances.

Calamity was not so well pleased. When he saw the red-skins swarm about his master, he growled and showed his teeth, and one half-grown warrior, paying no attention to him, suddenly felt his teeth nip his coppery calves. With a yell of pain, the savage made a jump up in air, as though he had suddenly stepped upon something hot, and drew his tomahawk upon the dog.

"Don't!" said Nick, laying his hand upon his arm; "the pup has already been skulped a half-dozen times; and I don't think you can gain much there; besides, the man that runs ag'in' the pup runs ag'in' me."

There was a smile upon the face of the trapper as he uttered these words, but there was also a dangerous glitter of his sharp gray eyes. Several were laughing at the discomfiture of the young warrior, and he slunk away and mingled with the others.

About this time, a number of dogs became aware of the presence of another of their own species, and they came bristling upon the scene. There were a half-dozen of them, and they came growling around the stranger in a most threatening manner.

Calamity treated them all with dignified indifference, and all took the hint except one mongrel cur that would not be put off. After several warnings, he finally flew, with open mouth, at him.

Ere his own mouth could close, the massive jaws of Calamity snapped shut, with the throat of the presumptuous canine between them. When Calamity loosened them, his victim dropped as lifeless as a stick to the ground.

Nick had managed to see all this, and he remarked, as he turned his head:

"Since Calamity has saluted that animale, I don't think, considerin' him as a dog, he's of much account. When you get through with 'em, Calamity, set 'em down soothin'-like, jist as a cat does her kitten."

The other curs did not seem particularly anxious to be "soothed" in this manner, and they took good care to give their ferocious visitor a wide berth.

Nick managed the negotiations with the skill of a Bismarck. He had learned from Mackintosh what he had to offer in the way of barter, and he was not long in finding out that the Blackfeet had a most valuable lot of beaver-skins, which they were saving up in anticipation of a visit from the agents of the North-west Fur Company, but which they were very ready to exchange with the party that would give them the best bargain.

They wanted knives, ammunition, blankets, and ornaments, and these were just what the trappers had brought with them.

When informed of this they scattered to bring forth their pelts. Piles of furs and skins were fetched from the different lodges, and then carried down to the river-bank, where they were thrown into a large heap, and the owners waited for the "barter" to open.

This was speedily done, Nick still acting as negotiator. Glittering knives and gaudy trinkets were handed over to him, and he passed them to the Blackfeet, receiving their furs in return.

The negotiations progressed very satisfactorily and with considerable expedition. The Blackfeet had been in this kind of business before, and they knew very well the price that the trappers would pay for their furs; so there was little haggling to check the bartering.

The two canoes were ranged alongside the

bank and the furs were passed to the men, who rapidly placed them in position.

At the end of a couple of hours the bargains were all completed. The entire pile of peltries was transferred to and distributed between the two canoes. Indian men, women and children were dancing with delight, and even the dogs seemed to share in the general exultation.

Occupied thus in frolicking over their new possessions, they did not think much of opening hostilities with the trappers. It would have been in keeping with the treacherous character of the Blackfeet to have attacked these men and robbed them of the goods they had just sold. Had they been sure of success, this is just what they would have done.

But there was that in the appearance of these same Hudson Bay trappers which satisfied the red-skins that there might be a slight unpleasantness, and very possibly a disappointment in undertaking such a thing.

Understanding what was passing through the minds of these dusky scoundrels, the whites conducted themselves accordingly. Their rifles and side-arms were displayed, and possibly the men put on a fiercer expression than usual.

His work done, Nick Whiffles very quietly stepped into the boat, Calamity whisking after him. At the same instant the paddles dipped into the water, the canoes instantly made a gap between them and the shore, and then, rounding in the river, started up-stream.

The Indians still danced with a "wild delight," Nick Whiffles stood in the boat smiling and waving his hand, like a father uttering a blessing on the heads of his frolicksome children.

The trappers rowed with their powerful stroke, and a few minutes later the Blackfoot village and its boisterous natives were shut from view.

CHAPTER VI.

"WILL YOU DO IT?"

A FEELING of relief came over the trappers as they felt they were out of sight of the dangerous Blackfeet, and that every minute was taking them further away.

As the distance increased, the low hum of a song began to be heard among them. It rapidly grew louder, until it swelled out into the same deep, musical melody that these men have so often awakened among the mountains of the North-west. There were voices rich in music among these trappers, and scarcely anything more charming could be imagined than to stand on a mountain several miles distant, and hear the song borne to you on the still air.

Nick Whiffles had stated to Mackintosh that the Indians were expecting the appearance of the North-west crew, so there was reason to fear that they were somewhere in the neighborhood, and a collision was possible.

Indeed, it seemed more likely than not that the two parties would meet, as the other brigade would be certain to descend the Elk in visiting the Blackfeet.

Mackintosh and his men had several days' paddling to do before they could reach a point where they could leave the Elk, and thus get off the road of their rivals, who, finding that they had been outwitted, would be very apt to make some dangerous manifestations.

The air was clear and bracing, and the two large canoes continued their swift course up the river with no interruption at all, until the usual time for halting, when the moon was directly overhead.

Nick Whiffles having performed his engagement for Mackintosh, received a very liberal fee from him, and understood that he was at liberty to depart whenever he chose; but, as they were carrying him toward the lonely spot in the wilderness where his cabin stood, he preferred to remain with them through the greater part of this day, at least.

When at noon the boats turned toward the shore, they had put a good number of miles between them and the Blackfoot village, so that they gave no further thought regarding it.

As before, they were surrounded by dense woods, and several of the men, upon landing, instantly plunged into the forest in quest of game. While the others were occupied in their various duties, Mackintosh requested Bandman to walk aside with him.

The two moved silently away among the trees, until they were beyond sight and hearing of their friends, when they seated themselves upon a mound of earth, and the Scotchman first spoke.

"Hugh," said he, in a low, confidential tone, "I have rather a curious proposition to make to you."

"I am ready to hear it," replied the trapper, in a serious voice.

"To come to the point, I have come to the conclusion to unravel the mystery regarding this Phantom Princess, as she is called, and I have fixed upon you as my agent."

"Why have you selected me?"

"For several reasons. One is that I know you better than I do the rest, and my knowledge of you is such as to give me the fullest faith in you. I can say that, during the long service that you have given the company, there never has been the first complaint against you, and you have never been known to fail in anything you undertook."

Bandman bowed his head to signify that he appreciated the compliment. Indeed, there was a certain dignity in the manner of the trapper, that would have impressed one in his favor.

"All this is preliminary," continued Mackintosh. "If I were asked to select a man from my party, who was free from superstition, there is only one about whom I could feel any certainty."

"I suppose you refer to me?" said the trapper, with a smile.

"Of course; brave as Nick Whiffles undoubtedly is, it was easy to see last night that he was impressed by what he saw, and holds a superstitious feeling about the Phantom Princess. I am satisfied, in my own mind, that, curious as was the scene, the actor in it was as much flesh and blood as either you or I. What do you think?"

"I agree with you."

"I did not doubt it. Furthermore, I believe that the mystery of the Princess lies in the Blackfoot village that we visited to-day."

Bandman started so perceptibly that Mackintosh laughed.

"What is it, Hugh?"

"Rather strange," replied his friend, with the same wan smile, "but, somehow or other, it is the same conclusion that forced itself upon me, while we were trading with them to-day."

"Good reason for believing we are right; did you observe anything that could give you a clue?"

"Nothing at all; I was on the look-out for it all the time, but could detect nothing."

"Have you any reason then for your belief?"

"Probably no more than you have; I am satisfied that this Nick Whiffles knows more about the matter than he is disposed to tell."

"Undoubtedly; but there is no use of questioning him; his lips are sealed, and he would resent any interference."

"Well, I am ready to hear any proposal," said Bandman, after a moment's silence between them.

"My official position under the company prevents my engaging personally in any thing of this character, as you can readily see; but there are several things that have awakened my suspicion since Nick Whiffles joined us, and I have the strongest desire to probe them to the bottom. You are the man I wish should undertake to clear up the doubt about this Phantom Princess. Will you do it?"

Bandman was silent a moment, and then, looking down to the ground, he spoke as though communing with himself.

"I have a great desire to do so."

"Will you undertake it?"

"Yes."

"That settles the great difficulty," said Mackintosh, with something of his natural cheeriness of manner, and then he added, in the same thoughtful tones:

"If I were talking to another person, I should name some pecuniary inducement—but not to you. You have an abundance of wealth in London, and I know no money could tempt you to engage in anything against your own desires."

"Of course," assented the trapper, with a sigh; "I have some curiosity regarding this person, and will undertake to identify her."

"It will be necessary for you to visit the Blackfoot village, and there will be no little personal danger in doing so."

"I know it," was the reply.

"To give a color of authority to your undertaking, I will make you the bearer of a message to the chief from me, asking him to catch and save all the peltries for us during the coming winter. Perhaps that will assist you through."

"It is a good suggestion," said Bandman, not a little pleased, "and with the exercise of a little tact upon my part, I think I can succeed. There is one promise, however, that I must exact of you, upon which depends my acceptance of this mission."

"It is given before you ask it."

"It is that, if I do not return to you, you will

make no attempt to assist me. No matter what happens to me, you are not to interfere, but wait till I appear before you, and if I do not put in an appearance, you may know that that is an end to my history."

"I cannot recall my promise," said Mackintosh, with a sadness of manner; "but it is given with a heavy heart."

Ever since the interview began, Hugh Bandman had been debating a question with himself. It was whether he should tell Mackintosh his own personal experience of the preceding night, when he learned that the Phantom Princess had a companion with her.

More than once he was on the point of doing so, but his natural caution intervened, and when the interview was drawing to a close, he had decided to make no reference to it at all in his presence.

"You can leave us to-morrow, or to-night, even, if you choose, without attracting notice, as the men are used to such things on your part, and then all will be left to your discretion. You need no directions from me."

"I hardly know how I shall act," continued the trapper, in that same absent way, "but I will trust in Providence, as I have always done in the past, and I am quite hopeful of coming out right."

"So am I; I shall look anxiously for your return to Fort William."

"I would prefer that you would forget all about me, and not expect me, until I appear before you."

"I would prefer to do that if it were possible, but such things are not so easily done!"

The two men talked together a few minutes longer, and then, as there was nothing of importance to add, both rose to their feet and began walking back toward the camp.

While engaged in talking, both had heard several reports of guns, from which they concluded that the hunters who had gone out in search of game were meeting with good success.

But when they emerged from the wood, they saw at once that there was some unusual excitement in the camp. The men were gathered in a group around two of the hunters, who were talking in an excited manner.

"What is it?" asked Mackintosh, as he hurried forward.

"The Nor'-westers are coming down the river, and a half-dozen of them fired at us."

"How near are they?"

"They will be in sight in five minutes!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE PEACE-MAKER.

THE tidings that a company of trappers belonging to the North-west Fur Company was close at hand was indeed exciting; but when it was learned that they numbered forty men, and that they had fired at the two hunters, the instant they recognized them, the news was indeed alarming.

There was no doubting the disposition of these men; the rivalry at the time of which I am speaking was so great between the agents of these two great companies, who both claimed Oregon Territory as their own trapping-ground, that more than one collision had occurred in that country, and there was always imminent danger when two of their parties encountered.

The two hunters stated that they had brought down a buffalo, that, badly wounded as it was, managed to run to the bank of the river where it fell dead. They hurried forward, and were on the point of applying their knives to the animal, when a shout caused them to look up, and they saw three large canoes, scarcely a hundred yards distant.

It required but a moment for them to see that they were Nor'-westers, who showed they were equally quick in identifying them, by sending several shots after them, accompanying the same with insulting epithets.

The men instantly took to their heels, and here they were.

"Did you fire at them?" asked Mackintosh.

"No; we left in rather too much of a hurry."

"I am glad of that; I don't wish to have a fight with them, and they can't say we have given them the provocation."

"We've given 'em the biggest kind," said Nick Whiffles, "and if you ain't mighty keeful, there's going to be the condemnedest diffikilty you ever heard tell on. Turn the heads of the canoes t'other way!"

This was uttered in such a peremptory tone that a number of men sprang forward and obeyed it.

"Ef they find out we've been down to the village and got the peltries they're after," remarked Nick, in explanation to Mackintosh,

"they'll be in fur a diffikilty sure as you're born. The idee is to make things look as though we war goin' down instead of up-stream."

There was barely time to explain this ruse to the men, when the three canoes made their appearance. Catching sight of the men on shore, a volume of shouts arose, that made Mackintosh tremble for the result.

"Let me do all the talking," said he to his men, "and avoid anything that will provoke them."

The boats headed for the landing, and in a few seconds the three ranged themselves alongside the shore and rested on their oars.

In the three boats were forty men—mostly Americans, although here and there a sprinkling of other nationalities could be discovered. They were a tough, courageous-looking set of men, dangerous to any sort of foe.

The leader or director of the expedition was a long-whiskered Missourian, who sat in the stern of one of the boats, smoking a large meerschaum pipe.

"Good-day to you," said Mackintosh, advancing to the edge of the water, and nodding pleasantly to this individual, whose reply came in a gruff voice.

"What the deuce are you doing in Oregon?"

"Hunting for furs."

"I should think it's about time you infernal Hudson Bay men learned that this country belongs to the universal Yankee nation."

"That question is not yet settled," replied Mackintosh; "we trapped in Oregon a hundred years before the North-west Fur Company was formed."

"Just because we let you—that's the only reason."

"There are treaties in existence giving us the privilege."

"Let's see them!" was the characteristic demand of the Missourian, starting up in indignation.

"I am not in the habit of carrying treaties around in my breeches pocket. I have seen the treaty; but your government and mine are now negotiating about this very thing, and until a decision is reached, I claim that my right is as good as yours to hunt and trap in all of Oregon."

"And I'll make affidavit it isn't; haven't you heard the news?"

"No; what is it?"

"The treaty has been concluded; Oregon is ceded to us, with the understanding that at the end of ten years, all of British America, Russian America, and Greenland are to be annexed to the United States, and I, Jake Belgrade, am to be appointed territorial Governor."

If Mr. Belgrade, of Missouri, had not drawn it quite so strong, possibly he might have succeeded in making some impression upon the matter-of-fact Scotchman, but the latter merely smiled, and replied:

"I haven't received official notice of it yet; when I do, it will be obeyed."

"We have," was the remark of the Missourian, "and we've come to Oregon for two things—one is to hunt furs, and the other to clear all you infernal Hudson Bay men out. What do you say, boys?"

"Ay! ay!" was the deep-mouthed response of the men, eager for any thing that promised the excitement of an affray.

"So if you chaps don't want to get eternally nipped out, you had better git up and git, in about three shakes of a lamb's tail."

"I am a subject of Her Majesty and I take no orders from any one except from her officers, my superiors."

"We've flaxed you Britishers more than once, and we can do it again."

Mackintosh fancied that he had his temper under full control, but he was not proof against the exasperating manner of the Missourian, and, if any one thing was certain at this point, it was that, unless some third party interfered, there would be a bloody and desperate encounter between the men, within the next ten minutes.

Nick Whiffles plainly saw this, and stepped forward at the critical moment.

"Mack, if you will allow," said he, addressing the Scotchman, "I'll put in a word or two—"

At this juncture, the North-west men recognized the old hunter and all cheered him. Every one knew him either personally or by reputation, and they respected and admired him.

Mackintosh comprehended the delicate situation, and with a graceful bow, stepped back, and made way for his friend.

Nick, with his long rifle in one hand, with Calamity at his side, and with a huge grin on

his face, looked serenely toward the Nor'-westers.

"What do you chaps want?"

"We want them Britishers to vamose the ranch," replied Belgrade.

"Wal, ain't they doin' it, as fast as they can?"

"That don't look much like it," said the Missourian, pointing to the canoes; "your boats are headed down-stream; that ain't the way to get out of Oregon."

"Ain't you willin' that they should go down the river and get some peltries of the Black feet?"

"Not much; that's just what we're after, and we intend to manage that business our selves."

"S'pose, then, I kin persuade 'em to turn about and go up-stream, there'll be no diffikilty?"

"Being it's you that has asked it, there won't be—but, we come into Oregon with our minds made up to shoot every Hudson Bay thief we found in the place; this thing has gone too far already, and we cracked away at 'em the minute we got sight of a couple of them up the river a little while ago."

"Keep easy there," said Nick, "till I can speak a word or so to Mack here."

Whiffles turned about and began conversing with Mackintosh in a low, earnest voice, occasionally indulging in quite excited gestures, while the members of both parties watched the two men with no little interest.

The interview lasted but a short time, when Nick turned to Belgrade.

"It goes rather ag'n' the grain to knuckle under in this 'ere style—if I was the man ther'd be a condemned diffikilty afore I'd pull down my flag."

"What does he say?" inquired the Missourian.

"That's what he says," was the reply, as the hunter pointed to a half-dozen men who were busying themselves in turning the canoes so as to head up-stream; "Mack, however, says he reserves the right to protest ag'in' this proceeding."

"Protest and be hanged," replied Belgrade. Oregon is a part of the United States, and no infernal red-coat has any right on it, without first asking permission of Uncle Sam, and if this thing isn't stopped, there's going to be war. I'm going to stir up Congress when I get back, and get 'em to notify the Hudson Bay Company that if they don't stop fooling and keep off our land, we'll bombard London, and capture her and her whole caboodle of a family, and hold 'em for hostages. I reckon that'll bring 'em to their senses."

And with this grandiloquent flourish, Mr. Belgrade gave the signal for his men to resume their course down-stream; but they had taken scarcely a dozen strokes, when he gave his parting shot:

"We'll watch for you, and if you undertake to steal by, we'll shoot every one of you, in spite of Nick Whiffles."

The Hudson Bay men preserved their solemnity of mien, until their rivals were beyond sight, when they indulged in some rather broad smiles at their success in outwitting them.

"When they get down to the village and find that we've been there," said Mackintosh, "I wonder if any of the company will be able to do justice to their feelings."

"I s'pose the part I played come as near lying as anything could," said Nick, "but I didn't see any other way of getting you out of the condemned diffikilty."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BOY TRAPPER AND THE DAWNING OF LOVE.

THE Hudson Bay men resumed their journey up the Elk river, paddling with scarcely any intermission until nightfall, when, as usual, they hauled up for the purpose of encamping.

Around the camp-fire passed story and jest until a late hour, when all, excepting the usual sentinels, turned in for the night, and at an early hour the brigade was under way again.

At noon the river made a sweeping bend toward the north, which, followed up a few miles further, would lead into unmistakable British territory, where there was no danger of molestation from any members of the great rival fur company.

At this point, Nick Whiffles and Ned Hazel left the company. They had made the nearest point to his home, and henceforth would draw further away from it. The parting was pleasant, and marked by good feeling upon both sides, but there was nothing of a pathetic character in it, as they expected to meet again in a few weeks at the furthest.

Nick and the boy stood on the shore, waving farewells to them, until around one of the many turns in the river they disappeared from view, when the two friends turned about, and plunging into the wilderness, set out for home.

The point at which they had left Shagbark, the horse, was several miles distant and out of their course; so Nick turned the duty over to Calamity.

"You know where we left him, pup," said he, addressing the canine; "go, fetch him back."

Ned Hazel himself did not understand this message any better than did the remarkable dog, who, with a pleased wag of his tail, galloped away in the direction of the faithful animal.

"He'll be at the cabin with him as soon as we," said the trapper, as the two turned about and resumed their journey through the woods.

Although the spring had fairly opened, the trapping season was not finished. The fur-bearing animals were still covered with heavy, valuable hides, which were eagerly sought after by the trappers. Nick Whiffles was still engaged in business, and, on starting for Fort William, he had left the matter in charge of Ned, who, having followed him down the river, made him the more anxious to return and ascertain his luck.

"There were good signs of beaver where I set them last two traps," remarked Nick, to the boy, as they walked along; "and if I ain't mistook most mightily, there will be some fur found in 'em, when we git back."

They were yet a mile or two from their cabin, when they turned off to the left, and finally reached a creek that came down from a chain of mountains some miles away.

Along this water the experienced eye of the trapper saw many signs of beavers, to which he directed the attention of the boy walking beside him. Where the indications were not readily perceived, he took as much care to explain them to him as though he were a paid instructor for teaching him the "profession" of trapping.

"Now, lad," said the old trapper, as he looked down benignly upon the boy, "you've spent a good number of years a-trampin' with me, and I reckon you've larned a powerful sight more nor I knowed at your age; so I'll let you go up this creek, and look arter the upper trap, while I tend to the others."

So they separated. Nick made the round of his traps, and was delighted at his good fortune, for in all, excepting one, he found a prize. The beavers all cried piteously when they saw him coming, but he speedily ended their sufferings, and slinging them over his shoulder, leisurely made his way to his cabin.

The afternoon was about half gone when he reached the building that, during all his wanderings, he had always looked back to as his home. True, he was often absent for weeks and months, sometimes away up among the frozen regions along James's Bay, and then far down toward the head-waters of the Red River of the North; but always, when he spoke of returning home, this was the place he meant.

It was constructed with some little skill. It had been located where two immense rocks made a right angle, so that two of its sides were impenetrable stone; the rest was made of logs and bark, with a sloping roof to shed the rain, and an opening, and an immense bear-skin, to serve as a door, which, when necessary, could be closed by a rock.

Within this lived Nick Whiffles and Ned Hazel. They had spent many happy years here, and hoped to spend many more.

Near by was a rough but secure shelter for Shagbark, where, when he chose, he could seek refuge from the storm. Calamity, as a matter of course, claimed the cabin as his head-quarters.

The house was not very attractive from the outside, but a good deal of comfort had been found there, not by Nick alone, but by many wanderers, both white and red, through this great wilderness of the North-west.

Having slain and skinned his beavers, Nick set about preparing supper for himself and Ned from the tails of the animals. These, when carefully cooked, afford a delicious and nourishing food, and are highly prized by the trappers who spend so much of their lives in these distant regions.

Calamity and Shagbark returned in the course of an hour. Both looked sleek and happy, and the tough, long-haired pony showed no little delight at being petted and caressed by his master. He had enjoyed a good play-spell, and was given liberty to continue it indefinitely, as there was no telling when his owner would start on his travels again.

The meat cooking, Nick Whiffles took down

his long-barreled rifle, and seating himself by the door, began to take it apart and clean it, and leaving him thus occupied, we will see what has become of Ned Hazel.

The lad went cheerily along, humming a merry tune, and feeling as joyous as a child does who is growing rapidly and in the enjoyment of fine health.

Now and then he lost sight of the creek as he was compelled to leave it to find better walking; but of course he followed its general direction, as he knew that the trap he was seeking was on its bank. On his way he passed what had once been a large beaver-dam—but it had been abandoned several years before by these sagacious animals, and as it now appeared, it looked somewhat like the ruins of some old town or village.

Passing a short distance beyond this, Ned reached the trap for which he was searching. A glance only was needed to show that it had caught a beaver, and that the animal had been released within a few minutes!

"That's strange!" exclaimed Ned, as he stood looking at the trap; "somebody has interfered with that. If Nick was here, he would hunt around for signs, and I guess I may as well undertake it, too."

A moccasin-print was speedily discovered in the soft earth, but it was of such delicate beauty as to show that no Indian warrior had made it.

"That has been done by some girl," added the boy, in greater astonishment than ever. "She has been here very lately."

"And she is here now, too."

Ned Hazel started as he heard these words uttered, in a clear, musical voice, at his very elbow. Turning at once, he fairly gasped at the vision he saw.

A girl, somewhat younger than himself, but with a complexion as clear and pearly-tinted as the sea-shell, and features of wonderful beauty, stood before him. Her hair, of rich auburn color, hung down her shoulders, and her dress was purely Indian in its character; but there was no mistaking her for one of that people. Her features and appearance were too decidedly Caucasian to admit any such impression.

She stood looking at the lad, with an innocent, inquiring expression, and he stood gazing at her in silent wonderment.

According to the eternal fitness of things, the girl was the first to speak.

"I let the beaver go, because it was suffering so much that I pitied it; you are not angry, are you?"

"Oh! no—no," stammered Ned, not a little embarrassed; "I wouldn't care if you let all the beavers in the country loose."

"I wouldn't do that, because all the beavers ain't caught," replied the girl, with a laugh; "but it cried just like you would, if a bear should catch you."

"How do you know I would cry?" demanded Ned, feeling a boyish resistance to being considered such a child as all that. "If a bear should catch me, I would turn about and fight him."

"Not if he had you fast so that you couldn't move hand or foot," persisted the young miss; "this poor beaver was hurt, too; it almost made me cry to see it."

Ned felt as though he would cry, too, if it would be any satisfaction to this young lady; but, as it was, he would much prefer to be considered a man in her presence; so he straightened himself up and looked as tall as possible, as he continued:

"You don't know how you startled me when you spoke."

"Yes, I do, for I saw you jump, and it made me laugh. You ain't afraid of me, are you?"

"You don't look as though you would hurt anybody."

"What is your name?"

"Ned Hazel."

"That is a pretty name; I suppose they called you that because your eyes are such a pretty hazel color. Do you want to know my name?"

"I do, indeed," replied the lad, blushing to his eyes.

"It is Miona, and I live among the Indians."

"All alone?"

"Why, no, of course not; haven't you ever seen my mother? She and I dress in white, and sometimes I go with her in her canoe at night."

"What!" exclaimed Ned Hazel, "are you the daughter of the Phantom Princess?"

"I don't know who you mean by that, but I am the daughter of my mother, and I promised to return to her; so good-by, Ned Hazel."

"Good-by—you—you—angel!" stammered the blushing Ned, as the little fairy tripped away.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SONG OF THE SIREN.

YOUNG Ned Hazel stood for a few minutes gazing at the point in the wood where the wonderful girl, Miona, had vanished.

Then, yielding to a strange impulse, he dashed headlong after her, not knowing really why he did so. The glimmering of a new emotion was in his heart, and he felt impelled by a desire to see and speak to her again. He was just of that age when the delight of young love was the sweetest, and the romantic, joyful feeling seemed to take entire possession of him.

And then, she was the daughter of the wonderful Phantom Princess about whom he had heard so much and so often, and who was involved in such a strange mystery!

But, rapidly as he moved, he was too slow to overtake the girl, who flitted like a fawn through the wood. Reaching the edge of Elk river he saw nothing of her. She had disappeared as entirely as did her mother a few nights before, when pursued by Mackintosh and his trappers.

For fully half an hour he stood on the shore, gazing wistfully up and down-stream, but in vain, and, with a sigh, he gave up the search as fruitless.

"Perhaps I shall see her again," he concluded; "at any rate I'll set the trap, and if it catches a beaver, she will come and let him out, and I will get another chance to see and talk with her."

The afternoon was well gone, and he knew that Nick would be expecting him, so he concluded to take another look up and down the river and then to make all haste home.

The glance which he cast up-stream showed him a small canoe descending, and in it was seated a single person, managing the paddle with a deliberation which proved that whatever might be his destination he was in no great hurry to reach it.

"Some trapper going it alone," concluded Ned, as he still lingered and watched.

Yielding to a feeling of caution, which his experience in the woods had taught him, he stepped back, so as to be invisible to the stranger himself. It was barely possible that he might be an enemy, and his prudence could not come amiss under any circumstances.

As the figure came closer and closer, something in its appearance struck Ned as familiar. He scanned it more closely and suddenly understood matters.

It was Bandman!

What could he be doing here?

"I suppose he's going on some errand for Mackintosh," concluded Ned, as he turned on his heel and started homeward.

He did not forget to pause and reset the trap, which had been disturbed by Miona, with the wish that she would make it another visit, just about the time he would reach the ground.

And then, as he resumed his homeward walk, another conviction made itself known. While talking with the girl, something in her face seemed familiar. It was only the faintest, most shadowy resemblance to something that he had met somewhere before. Whether it was away back in that dim period preceding his own advent into this solitude, or whether it had visited him in his dreams, he could not say; but he clung to the belief that it was no fancy of his; and speculating and unable to solve what it meant, he finally reached home, where old Nick was just beginning to wonder at his prolonged delay.

But what meant this canoe voyage of Hugh Bandman?

My reader has probably suspected what it meant.

A few hours after the separation of Nick Whiffles from the Hudson Bay trappers, a party of friendly Indians had been encountered, who had a few furs to sell. A halt was made and a barter effected.

Among the purchases made, was a small canoe, which was turned over to Hugh Bandman, with the cautious remark that he might use it whenever he chose.

He chose to do so at once.

"I may as well begin this business without any further delay," said he, as he stepped within and took the paddle.

A few words were interchanged and then the parties separated. The Indians of whom the boat had been purchased remained on shore, so that Bandman descended the stream again without any company at all.

He saw nothing of Ned Hazel, and passed directly by him without suspecting his presence or proximity.

"Shall I be able to solve this mystery?" asked

the lonely trapper, as he thoughtfully plied his paddle. "Can it be that Mackintosh suspects? No—impossible!"

He was pale and his lips compressed, as though agitated by some strong emotion, and now and then he gave utterance to his troublous thoughts.

"It may be—the date—there are several things—but no, such a thing was never heard of in the wildest romance—but I shall never return from this expedition until I have learned—"

"Hist! what was that?"

His heart gave a great bound, and he held the paddle motionless in his hand and scarcely breathed.

While he leaned forward, he saw in the distance, gliding close to shore, what had met his vision twice before. It was the Phantom Princess in her white canoe!

The boat was so white that at first glimpse it seemed like some strange bird hunting its way back again to its home, deep in the primeval wilderness; but as he looked, he could discern the form of the Princess herself seated in it.

Her daughter, dressed in her gaudily colored dress, was reclining in the bow, but she was so concealed by the intervening figure of her mother that the trapper saw nothing of her.

"It is she—it is she!" muttered Bandman, "and she must see me. I will follow her."

He paddled more vigorously, in the hope that she would permit him to approach or overtake her; but he was not long in learning that it was her wish that their relative distance should be maintained for the present at least; so he ceased his efforts and followed her more leisurely.

Before he was aware, night was upon him, and he discovered that he was following her by moonlight—a bright, clear moonlight, that served almost as well as the day, inasmuch as she avoided the shadow of the shore, and kept as near the middle of the stream as possible.

Bandman scarcely removed his eyes from her; his great fear was that she might take it into her head to whisk as suddenly out of sight as she did when pursued by the trappers.

He found that, with the coming of night, she permitted him to approach considerably closer to her canoe. Indeed, scarcely more than a hundred yards separated them, and had she chose, they could have easily conversed in an ordinary tone.

Bandman made several attempts to lessen the distance, but he saw that it rested entirely with her, and she governed her progress entirely by his.

A couple of hours passed thus—although the trapper was not conscious of the lapse of time—when he became aware that the Phantom Princess was singing.

Singing, it is true, in a low, faint voice—but in tones of irrepressible sweetness.

She was uttering no words, but rather humming some plaintive air, that came to the ears like the sad, touching strains of the wind-harp.

The trapper ceased rowing and bent his head to listen. It came to his ears, like the tones that visit us in our dreams of the angels, and, as he sat motionless, he felt then more than ever before, that there must be something supernatural about this wonderful being whom he was following with such resolution.

He looked up to see if she was still paddling away from him. No; she too was resting on her oars, and both were floating with the current. He was drifting away more in a dream than in his waking senses.

The voice never rose above that faint, tremulous, touchingly sweet tone, that seemed to penetrate his very being.

Hark!

Why does he gasp and start? Surely he has heard that strain before! Yes; long years ago it had melted his heart with tenderness, and now it fairly drove him wild.

"I will overtake you! I can stand this no longer!"

And seizing his oar, he rows with a furious energy such as he has never known before.

And is there no hand raised to stay him? Ah! no, and he is surely rushing upon his doom, lulled thither by the song of the siren?

CHAPTER X. DOOMED.

It was like the fabled siren of old. Hugh Bandman seemed literally powerless to resist the impulse to approach that wonderful personage known as the Phantom Princess.

The voice, naturally of the tenderest sweetness, had every accessory to make it impressive in the highest degree. The silent river, with its somber woods on every hand, the silvery moonlight, and the mystery which superstition had thrown about her; all these, added to the

peculiarly nervous condition of the trapper, tended to lighten what at any time would have produced a powerful effect.

Bandman, as I said, plied his paddle as he had never plied it before. It was with the feeling that he would overtake and look more clearly upon her face, even if it cost him his life.

He saw, too, after going a short distance in this furious manner, that he was really gaining upon the Princess—very slowly, it is true, but unmistakably nevertheless. She, too, was using her oar with extraordinary power, and the two boats shot forward with surprising velocity.

The canoes were as near the center of the stream as might be, and each was heading down the river. Despite the extraordinary efforts of the fugitive, the voice seemed to float over the water with undiminished sweetness.

All at once it changed—changed so suddenly and so radically as to be startling. The sad, plaintive character was lost, and it took an exultant, joyous strain, as if the singer was triumphant over some trouble that had long distressed her.

Different as it was in every respect, except in the wonderful sweetness of its tones, it had, if possible, a far more powerful attraction to the maddened pursuer. Had she really desired him to overtake her, she could scarcely have taken a surer means of doing it; for the distance now steadily diminished until less than fifty yards separated them, and every thing indicated a speedy termination of the race.

At this juncture an alarming phase of the contest manifested itself. Had a person stood upon shore, and watched the two boats, he would have discovered a third, some distance in the rear of the second. This was much larger than either, and in it were seated five Blackfoot warriors of the fiercest and most treacherous character.

The trapper saw them not, and if he had, he scarcely would have heeded them; but they were drawing near him, with the swift, stealthy, and sure approach of the panther upon its sleeping victim.

Was the Princess growing weary?

Certainly her stroke was losing its quick elasticity, and her pursuer was gaining at a faster rate than before. Bandman even began to slacken his own speed, so as not to overtake her too rapidly.

Sure now of coming up with the mysterious woman, a strange fluttering took possession of the trapper. Long years of danger and severe mental suffering, had given him a stoicism and mastery over his emotions such as a Blackfoot himself might have coveted, but he was now swayed by feeling such as he had not known for a long, long time.

"Strange! strange! can it be?" he kept muttering, leaning forward, and straining his vision to get a nearer view of the female.

He had discovered some time before that there was a second figure in the boat, but he paid no heed to that. His whole attention and mind were centered upon her—her—the Phantom Princess.

Stroke by stroke he advanced, until scarcely a score of feet separated the two boats. Then the trapper paused rowing, in doubt what was best for him to do.

She had ceased singing and paddling, and sat motionless in her boat, quietly contemplating him, with turned head and motionless arms.

At the same time that Bandman stopped his efforts, the Indians, a hundred yards in the rear, did the same, and began stealing nearer and nearer, resembling still more the insidious approach of the panther to its unconscious victim.

Bandman was sitting motionless, scarcely knowing what to do, and yet gradually drawing nearer, when the Phantom Princess spoke.

"Why have you pursued me?"

"To find out who you are," was the instant response of the trapper, who appeared to rouse from his spell by the voice of the charmer.

"Have you ever heard of me before?"

"I have heard you called Phantom Princess. Do you live among the Indians?"

"I saw you and your friends at our village the other day, when you came after furs."

"Were you there?" continued Hugh, earnestness making his questions more pointed than otherwise they would have been.

"I sat in my lodge, with my daughter, and we watched you until you went away."

"Why did you not let us see you?"

"We are seen—or I am only seen—at night, by your people."

"That is a strange fancy—may I ask why it is?"

"You will learn before you return."

There was a significance in these words which Hugh Bandman would have noticed at any other time; but, half wild with all sorts of conflicting thoughts, he was in doubt at times whether he was acting in a dream or a reality.

Scarcely without knowing it himself, Bandman was so toying with his paddle that he was drifting closer and closer to the white canoe. Close as he already was, he was unable to gain any thing like a fair view of her face and features, as she held them shaded in such a way that it was impossible.

There was a wild, maddening, distracting suspicion still controlling and urging the trapper onward. More than once the deciding question was upon his tongue, but he forced it back.

"You are a long ways from your home," said he.

"I have been many miles further," she answered, "and have never yet lost my way."

"You are not a Blackfoot; you have once lived somewhere else among civilized people. How long have you been with the Indians?"

This question was unanswered. For some reason or other, the Princess declined to say any thing at all. Her silence first reminded the trapper that he was asking some questions without any authority, and with little regard to propriety.

"Still, in a certain sense, he was desperate, and he continued:

"May I ask your name?"

"You mentioned it yourself a few minutes ago."

"The Phantom Princess is a title—not a name."

"It is the only one by which I am known among the white people and my adopted kindred."

"Have you your daughter with you?"

"I have—her name is Miona."

"A beautiful Indian name—are you now returning to your home in the village?"

"I am."

"May I go with you?"

"You must go!"

"What—"

At that instant Hugh Bandman heard the splash of a paddle, and in alarm turned his head—but it was too late. The five Indians were upon him, all armed to the teeth, and ready to riddle him at the first show of resistance.

He saw this and quickly submitted to the inevitable; but he turned toward her with the simple question:

"Did you do this?"

"Yes," was the reply of the Phantom Princess, as she caught up her paddle and dashed away almost with the speed of a swallow. And then her laughter, rippling, joyous, and musical as ever, came back to him across the water.

"Poor thing, she is crazy!" muttered Bandman, as he gazed after the swift-vanishing canoe; "and I have been the fool to follow her in a wild, unreasonable belief that she was another person."

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE TRAP.

WHEN Hugh Bandman heard the avowal of the Phantom Princess, he had not the least doubt of her insanity, and at the same time he felt a disgust at the part he had played in a farce which now bid fair to become a tragedy.

"Why had not Mack and I brains enough to take a common-sense view of the matter?" he asked himself, "and why was I such a consummate fool as to imagine such a thing possible, that they two could be one?"

But, his situation was so serious as to demand his attention and thoughts. He saw how the cunning female had lured him on to his own destruction, and then exulting at her work, had hied away, leaving him with his captors.

His first supposition was that they would put him to death instantly, and his feeling of mental depression was such that he cared very little what they did with him; but a few minutes seemed to show him that their intention was to take him to the village with them.

Their first proceeding, after making sure of his capture, was to deprive him of his weapons, after which, two of the Indians, paddle in hand, stepped into his canoe, and one took his seat in front and the other in the bow, so that, placed between these two savage warriors, with the other three following close in their wake, it would have taken a man with superhuman power to make himself free from them.

But there was no danger of Hugh Bandman making any such attempt. There was a moment, when life was never so precious to him—

and it was then that wild, delirious hope was leading him on.

That had passed, and dull despair had succeeded. He was indifferent to what became of him.

"I have carried the burden of life for a long time, until it has no more attractions for me, and I may as well lay it down in this solitude as among my kindred. On the broad earth there is no one who cares for me."

This was a sad wail to utter, but Bandman felt it, as he resignedly folded his arms and remained quiescent in the power of his captors.

The Indians seemed to have no appreciation of the sentimental, and they kept steadily on, with that deliberation of movement seen when oarsmen are conscious they have started upon a long journey.

Besides the mental depression, a sort of physical exhaustion succeeded the undue excitement under which the trapper had been laboring, and a sort of drowsy stupor came over him, and lulled by the soft, gliding motion of the boat, his head dropped upon his breast and he sunk into a dreamless slumber.

Several times he opened his eyes, but it was only to hear the regular sweep of the Indian paddles, and to see the dusky figures of his captors very near him. Once he roused enough to recognize the dark line of wood along shore, and to see the full, round moon riding high in the sky, and shedding her silvery radiance over the stream.

Then he sunk off into slumber again and did not rouse until it was broad daylight around him.

Scarcely any halt was made by the Blackfeet during the succeeding day, and Bandman, wrapped in his own meditations, did not attempt to exchange a word with them, in the broken English which they occasionally used in speaking, as though they were inviting him to say something.

Not a mouthful of food was partaken by any member of the party during the entire day. When thirsty, the trapper dipped his hand in the water beside the canoe, and scooped up enough to slake his thirst.

Just at nightfall, the village was reached. The arrival of the prisoner caused very little excitement. Several gathered around the white man, but no violence was offered him, and he was conducted to a lodge near the center of the town, into which he was ushered, and then left entirely alone.

Naturally the captive looked about at his surroundings. The building was a powerfully constructed one, quite small, with a bundle of ropes in one end, and upon a sort of stump near the middle, burned a light of oil, rudely made, but serving to illuminate the interior quite well.

Upon the same stand lay some cooked meat, and a sort of gourd of water. Indeed, the appearance of everything indicated that preparation had been made for receiving the prisoner. The Phantom Princess had doubtless preceded the coming of the white man, by several hours, and had seen that things had been put in a shape for him.

"Doubtless this den has been used for the same purpose before," concluded Hugh, as he gazed wonderingly about him; "here the prisoners that she lured to their destruction are placed, and perhaps given a little time to prepare for death."

Frightful as was the situation of the trapper, he did not need the sight of the food to remind him that he was half-famished. He attacked it with such vigor, that when he had finished, nothing but a few scraps of bones remained.

His hunger sated, something like a reaction came to Bandman, and a new desire for life came to him. Reclining upon the pile of buffalo-hides, he endeavored to think seriously of his situation. He was so cramped from sitting in one position so long in the canoe, that he stretched out flat upon his back and looked up to the rugged ceiling of poles and bark overhead.

"Here I am," he mused; "there can be no doubt that I am intended for death, and I see no earthly prospect of escape."

Then turning his head toward the opening through which he had entered, he added, in the same musing tone:

"I am not bound, and it would be very easy for me to spring to my feet and dash out into the open air; but, of course, this lodge is under the surveillance of more than one pair of eyes, and I could not get a dozen steps away without being caught, and no doubt subjected to great indignity."

Rolling his head back, he closed his eyes.

"It was her wish; she planned from the beginning to draw me into this, and how well she

has succeeded. Her manner assures me that she has done this thing more than once; how many hapless beings have spent their last hours here!

"She must be insane, and must hold a powerful influence over these Indians; that doubtless is the reason she is called a princess, and then her way of dressing in white and painting her canoe that color, and her extraordinary skill in handling the paddle, have given her the name of the Phantom Princess among the superstitious hunters and trappers of this region."

Then he suddenly thought of the company of North-west trappers that had gone ahead of him to this village. What had become of them? Most likely, after finding that they had been outwitted, they had continued on down the river, knowing it was too late to return, and overtake the offending party that had discomfited them.

Again his thoughts came back to her who was the cause of this calamity of his.

"There is a method in insanity, and there must have been some powerful cause to turn her mind in this direction. She must have received some terrible wrong at the hands of her people to cause her to turn with such implacable hatred upon them."

"Who can she be?"

"She would not give me her name. All I know is that she has a child with her, whom she claims as her daughter. Where, then, is the father of the girl? Can it be that his treatment of her was such as to change her feelings toward all her race, and to cause so many innocent to suffer?"

"So it seems to me," he added, as he continued the train of thought—"Sh!"

A slight rustling caused him to turn his head; the Phantom Princess was before him!

CHAPTER XII.

FACE TO FACE IN THE DEATH-LODGE.

HUGH BANDMAN sprang to his feet, and confronted the woman who had entered the lodge. He was pale, and quivering like an aspen, while she stood as immobile as a statue of ice. He stared like a man who had lost his senses. His breath came through his closed teeth as though he were choking. He could only gasp, "My heavens!" and then he sunk back senseless upon the skins behind him.

The Phantom Princess still did not stir. She was dressed in the same white, ghostly robes, and her large dark eyes were fixed upon him, as though they would pierce him through and through.

In a few minutes his strong nature reasserted itself, and he roused up again. Rising to a sitting position, he groaned:

"Oh, Myra! Myra! do I dream, or is it you indeed?"

Then she spoke, in the low, terrible tones of intense passion:

"Yes, it is I, Myra—she whom you once called your wife. I am not crazy, as you imagine. I saw you when you came with the party the other day; I knew you; I felt that my day of revenge had come; Providence had opened the way, and I knew that you would be thrown into my power. I followed you; I drew you on—and you are here; and when you leave this place, you go to your death!"

While she was speaking, she stood with hand uplifted, as though pronouncing judgment upon him. He could only reach his arms imploringly toward her, and moan his agony, which was too great for words.

"Your perfidy toward me has caused me to hate the face of all my race; and the hate of a dozen years is all centered upon YOU. It is I who brought you here—it is I who will delight in your suffering and death; let that thought fill your last moments upon earth. I now bid you good-by!"

With the air of an empress, she turned to walk out. She had reached the entrance, when the miserable man found his voice.

"Myra, wait one moment!"

"Well?" she said, pausing and half turning round, but making no motion to return.

"Come back, I command you; you must listen to me."

"I can hear what you have to say without coming nearer you."

"If you are in your right mind, tell me—tell me, I implore—why you left me in London?"

"Tell you why I left you?" she repeated, her whole being consumed with scorn. "Why do you ask such an idle question? Must I refer to the time when you won my heart—when I gave you my love, and when I stood beside you at the altar, secretly but lawfully married, as I believed, in obedience to a request of yours; and

then, when I discovered, a week later, that you had deceived me—that I was *not* your wife—can you wonder that I fled from you as from a pestilence?"

"Was that why you left me?"

"Was not that a thousand reasons? Disgraced, dishonored, was I to remain in London, with no friend in the world? No; God restrained me from suicide, but I left the country forever; I came upon my uncle's vessel to Fort Churchill; there I remained until my daughter was born, and then I fled into the woods. I found my way, after many weary days and nights of suffering, to these people. They had pity upon me; they treated me kindly, and with them I have lived ever since, and with them I expect to die. I have befriended no white man—none except Nick Whiffles, who is different from others of his race, and who was so kind to me that I can feel no hatred toward him."

"But I *am* the enemy of all others, and to no one am I such an enemy as to you. You are now in my power; you have tasted a woman's love, and now you shall taste of a woman's HATE!"

Singularly enough, Hugh Bandman was now quite cool and self-possessed. It was an unnatural calm, but it was a calm, nevertheless.

"Myra, before bidding each other farewell," said he, as he leaned upon his elbow, "we may as well understand each other. I will answer any question you may propose, and will you do the same for me?"

"Let me hear them," she replied, standing as motionless as before, but the picture of the intensest excitement.

"By what means did you learn that you were not my wife?"

"What matters it how I learned it, so that I did learn it?"

"You have not answered me. Was it through Richard McCabe?"

"It was."

"What proof did he give you?"

"He brought me a note from the man who had acted the part of minister in marrying us. He repented the part he had played in being your agent, and begged me to do what I could not—forgive him."

"You did not see the man, Mr. Dumfries, himself?"

"He had not the courage to show his face—so he sent the note; that told all—was not that enough?"

"Did it ever occur to you that you might have been deceived?—that Mr. Dumfries did not write or send you the note?"

"I do not know what you mean."

"To be brief, then, Mr. John Dumfries was a regularly-ordained minister of the Church of England; you are my lawful wife, and he never sent you a note or a word to the contrary."

"But I have the note with me," said she, turning about, and walking toward him.

"Let me see it," said Bandman, with that same wonderful coolness of manner, as he reached out his hand for it.

She hesitated a moment, and then, walking a step or two nearer, flung it at him, as though she could not trust herself to approach any nearer.

"Were I in a civilized country, I would not trust you with it, but it can make no difference now."

Hugh Bandman picked up the folded bit of paper and opened it. It had been carefully preserved, and he read it without difficulty. When he had finished he folded it up again and threw it toward her.

"Just what I expected—that is the handwriting of Richard McCabe, and he wrote it on purpose to destroy your happiness and mine."

"I will not believe it—it cannot be true!" was the impetuous exclamation of the Phantom Princess, advancing still closer.

"Somehow or other, I have always fancied that you and I would meet again in this life, and I have always gone prepared for it, as you will shortly perceive. Listen, then, Myra, to a few words of mine:

"Richard McCabe was an admirer and lover of yours before I saw you. He did all he could to win you, but failing, and finding that you and I were plighted, he still sought to prevent our marriage. He went to you with whisperings against me, but you scorned him; he came to me with insinuations against you, but I thrust him out of the house. I thought that that was the last of him, so far as concerned us, but it was not. A week after our marriage, I came home one evening to find that you had fled. You had left no word of explanation behind you, so that I had not the slightest suspicion of why or where you had gone. I could only be-

lieve that you had gone off in some mental aberration, and a number of the best detectives were put upon your track. They learned nothing of what had become of you, and I came to the conclusion that you were dead in the Thames.

"Not the slightest suspicion of the true cause of your absence had come to me. My marriage was a secret from my friends for the simple reason that I lacked a few months of reaching my majority, and was not yet legally my own master. A few of my intimate friends were in the secret, and one evening, when McCabe was rather the worse for the wine he had drunk, he said something that roused the most dreadful suspicion in my mind. I could not get much out of him, but enough to satisfy me that you were hiding somewhere, under the belief that I had done you some great wrong.

"The few words that I got from him were uttered accidentally. When he was himself, I taxed him with it, but he had no recollection of what he had said, and denied all knowledge of you in the most solemn manner. Nevertheless, his appearance convinced me of his guilt, and I employed a man to watch.

"McCabe did not know at this time whither you had gone, but he had a suspicion, and he discovered it at last, and he followed you. When my man found that he had embarked for North America in one of the Hudson Bay Company ships, he became satisfied that you had done the same some weeks before.

"When he told me this, I remembered you had an uncle who was the captain of one of their vessels, and there could no longer be any doubt of the direction you had taken. Prudence would have suggested that I wait until his return, and learn the truth from him, but that would have necessitated a delay of several months, which would have driven me mad, so I set sail in the very next vessel that left for this country.

"We encountered the 'Albatross' as we entered Baffin's Bay, and I went on deck and saw your uncle. He told me his lips were sealed, and refused to answer me any questions at all, even after I had made him understand that you had been deceived.

"I had no doubt at all that you were at Fort Churchill, but I did hope to gain some particulars of him; I did not, and so we separated.

"While entering Hudson's Bay, we were caught in a tempest and wrecked. We lived on that barren coast for several months, and then were picked up and carried to Ungava. It was then a long time before I could get across to Fort Churchill.

"I succeeded at last—but when I reached the place, a year and more had passed since you left London.

"At Fort Churchill I learned that you had been there, and that a child had been born. You had received the kindest treatment, but when the short, beautiful summer came, you had escaped and fled no one knew whither.

"McCabe was dead; the miserable man had followed you to Fort Churchill, but one day, when hunting near the fort, he got caught in a snow-storm, and perished within a hundred yards of the gate of the fort.

"Then I set out to hunt for you. For two years I never ceased my search, except for a few hours, when exhausted nature compelled me to do so.

"The end of it all was that I learned nothing at all of you, and I agreed with Mackintosh, who knew my secret, that you and your child had perished somewhere in the wilderness. He wished me to return to England, as he thought the change would benefit me; life had now lost its charms for me, and I was willing to die here. I refused to go, and engaged as an ordinary trapper under him.

"Thus I have been employed ever since. Once or twice during the past five years I heard of the Phantom Princess, but no suspicions of her identity came to me until within the past few days. This is the first time I ever accompanied Mackintosh to this village, and when I saw you, I thought it barely possible that you might be my long-lost wife. You know what has followed."

"During this narration, Myra had remained standing in the same immovable, statue-like position, while Bandman sat upon the pile of skins, talking as though he were discussing some ordinary business matter. He now rose to his feet and advanced nearer.

"That you may not doubt my word, I have always carried the proof with me."

With which he drew a package from his inner breast-pocket, and handed it to her. She took it mechanically and opened it.

She read it carefully, and saw that it was a legal certificate of her marriage, properly

witnessed, and signed by Rev. Mr. Dumfries, who had officiated in the capacity of minister at the time.

All this she saw. Then that wild, fierce light, born of long suffering and hate, died out, and, in its stead, came a deadly pallor to the face—the pallor of despair. A cry bubbled up from her lips like that of a mother over her lost darling. Her arm, outstretched, moved to and fro as if to dissolve some horrid vision, and her staring eyes glared in their intense gaze on vacancy, as she wailed:

"Doomed—doomed! and by my act! Oh! Hugh—darling Hugh! My hand has brought him to this—my hand!" she sobbed, holding out before her that beautiful white hand.

"He never wronged me—he loved me through all these dreadful years—he sought me out in these dreadful wilds to say that he loved me, and I lured him on—to the Death Lodge—to the Death Lodge!—I, his wife!"

The hand moved in the air again; then she stood like one frozen in her sorrow, still as the dead, for a moment only, then dropped to the ground as one dead indeed.

Her husband sprang toward her and lifted her head upon his lap. Fondly he kissed the lips again and again, pressed the head to his breast, and while his eyes rained tears, murmured:

"My wife—my own darling wife—united again, after all these long, cruel years. Myra, my own—my dearest. Poor, deceived Myra; I forgive all, and with death staring me in the face, I plead for your love."

Opening her eyes, she looked yearningly at him for a moment, and then reaching up her arms, closed them about his neck.

"My husband!"

Their hearts were too full to speak further, and for several minutes they could only mingle their tears. Then they sat side by side and talked for a few moments, when Myra said:

"You are condemned to death, dearest Hugh; there is no escape for you, but I will die with you; that at least shall be my expiation. Oh, the wrong I have done! Alas, that, now that I have found out what life is, it should be so soon ended!"

"Perhaps there is happiness yet for us; you are free to move about without question; go and see Nick Whiffles."

"I will do so at once!" she exclaimed, springing to her feet. "He shall save you—save you, Hugh! God has sent him to this wilderness for this work—to save you, my husband!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A JUVENILE wooing.

THE next morning after the meeting of Miona and Ned Hazel, the lad went early to the trap that had been visited by her. He found a squealing beaver in it, but there was no kind hand to set it free. He let it cry for a while in the hope of drawing his visitor to the spot.

But, although he waited some time, she came not, and he was compelled to kill and carry it home. The same thing took place on the second morning, but the third saw his ardent wishes gratified.

There was no beaver in the trap, and he stood feeling as grieved and disappointed as a young gentleman could well feel whose dearest hopes had been blasted, and who was ready to lie down and die in despair.

While in this miserable mood, he raised his eyes and saw two persons standing before him. One was the Phantom Princess, and the other was Miona, her daughter. They were standing side by side, neither dressed in white, but both in the brilliantly colored dress of the Blackfoot squaws who stood high in the graces of their warrior husbands.

Ned blushed, and saluted them with natural gallantry. Myra said:

"I am looking for Nick Whiffles; is he at home?"

"He was there an hour ago, when I left; he is cleaning up his gun, so if you want to see him, you will find him there. I will show you the way."

"No; I do not wish you to do it," said she, interposing. "I know the way there myself. I only wanted to make certain of finding him."

"I am sure he is there; it is all of two miles distant, and you had better let me go with you," said Ned, who did not like the idea of losing the companionship of the girl, now that she had been so long coming.

"I would prefer that you should remain here," she said, quite earnestly. "I wish to see him on very particular business, and wish no one else near."

"You don't suppose I would stay near, while you were talking?" said the lad, reproachfully.

"No, but as I shall leave Miona here until I return, and, as she says you and she are acquainted, I had hopes that you would be willing to remain and keep her company."

"Oh! I'll do that!" exclaimed Ned, his face glowing with delight. "I have my gun with me, and I will take the best of care of her."

"Don't be gone too long," said the young maiden, as her mother started to move away.

"I will be back by noon," she replied, as she kissed her good-by, and speedily vanished in the forest.

"I only wish it was night," thought Ned, as he realized that he was along with the one of whom he had been dreaming day and night, ever since he had first met her.

But he felt certain of several hours with her, and a sense of pleasurable delight came over him, and he suspected that Miona was quite willing to spend that time in his company.

Innocent and pure-minded as was Miona, and ignorant, too, of the great emotion of love, she was artless and unembarrassed. Ned, despite his backwoods training, was naturally polite, his genuine goodness of heart resembling, in a great measure, the kind nature of Nick Whiffles.

"I am sorry for mother," said the girl, as the two unconsciously walked away in the direction of the river.

"Why, what's the matter with her?"

"Something dreadful—she would not tell me what—but she has done nothing but cry and pray ever since we started from home. I saw the Indians scowl at her, and several of them seem to be angry about something; but she cries so much that I have been crying too."

And her pretty eyes filled with tears, while Ned wanted to comfort her, and wasn't exactly certain how it should be done.

"I didn't see that anything much was the matter with her," he said. "She wasn't crying when she went by here."

"Because she has wept so much that she cannot. I am glad Nick Whiffles is at home, for if she had been disappointed in seeing him, I don't know what she would have done."

"If Nick can do any thing in the world for her, he'll do it; I know Nick."

"I can't understand how he is to help her," continued Miona, with a look of great perplexity; "for she has a good many friends among the Indians, and she is considered a sort of queen among them. But I think it must have something to do with that white man the Indians have in the Death Lodge."

"Who is he?" asked the astonished Ned.

"Somebody followed us in a canoe, and the Blackfeet caught him, and I suppose they will put him to death, as they have a good many others. She keeps talking about somebody named Hugh; do you know anybody by that name?"

Ned did not, although, had she said Bandman, he would have recognized it.

"Well," added Miona, with a sigh, "I suppose she will tell me some day. Here we are at the bank of the river, and yonder is my canoe."

"Let us go look at it."

"You can ride in it if you choose."

The boat, of a natural dusky bark color, lay but a short distance away, and the two made their way to it.

"We have a long time to wait; let us cross over to the other side and explore it," said the girl, stepping lightly into it.

Ned was only too happy to join in the excursion, so he followed her and took up the oars.

"Which way shall we go?" he asked, forgetting that she had just told him the direction.

"Across, I said; or, if you wish it, you can go up or down, but we mustn't be away when mother returns."

Ned handled the oar with no little skill, and he sent the light canoe skimming swiftly over the river, which at this particular place was quite broad.

Miona sat in the prow of the boat, as though she was mistress of the situation, her large, lustrous eyes fixed upon Ned Hazel, who, blushing deeply, plied the paddle with all the grace of which he was capable.

Touching the opposite bank, the girl sprang lightly out, and he followed her, pausing long enough to draw the canoe up out of the way of the current.

The boy carried his rifle with him, as was his invariable custom, and he only wished that some huge bear or other animal would cross their path, that he might show the beautiful prattling maiden at his side how much he was

willing to do for her; but no danger appeared, and he could only do his best to keep pace with the wonderful volubility of her tongue.

Meager as was the education of Ned Hazel, he could tell from the conversation of the girl that she had acquired a great deal of knowledge, and he concluded at once that the Phantom Princess must be a personage of wonderful wisdom to have taught such a small girl.

Now and then he stole a side-glance at her, and on each occasion he was reminded of that singular, shadowy resemblance, of which we have spoken. It puzzled him greatly, but at last he fathomed the mystery.

It came upon him all at once. She looked like the trapper Bandman, who sat next to him in the canoe. Strange that he had not noticed it before.

"Have you always lived among the Indians?" asked Ned, as he walked slowly and thoughtfully beside the girl.

"Ever since I can remember," she replied; "but you can see I am not an Indian. Why do you ask?"

"I have often wondered, since I saw you the other day, how it was that you and your mother was in this out-of-the-way place."

"So you have been thinking of me?" asked Miona, turning her laughing face toward that of her companion.

"I should think I had," replied Ned, again blushing. "I haven't thought of much else. I asked Nick all about you."

"And what did he tell you?"

"He told me to keep still, and he didn't know anything to tell me."

"I guess he don't know much about me, but he has heard of mother before."

"Yes, but I couldn't get him to tell anything about her. Fact is, he don't seem to like to talk much about her."

"Have you lived in the woods ever since you can remember?" asked the girl.

"No," was the prompt response. "I was born in some city, and left here by somebody."

"You don't know by whom? How strange that neither of us can tell how it is we came to live here?"

"Do you love this life?"

Miona was silent a few moments before she answered:

"Yes; but sometimes, when mother has told me of the cities and countries that are all over this beautiful world, I feel a longing to go and see them."

"So do I," said Ned, with compressed lips. "I have a kind of faint memory of things very different from these, and I will tell you something, Miona, if you will keep it a secret."

"Of course I will."

"I don't intend to spend my life here. When I get to be a man—"

"Why, you are nearly a man now!" interrupted the girl, with a laugh.

"Do you think so?" asked Ned, delighted. "Well, when I get to be a man I'm going to leave this place and see the world."

"I would do so, too, if I were you."

"And Miona, why won't you go with me?"

"Oh! I can't leave mother," said the startled girl; "what would become of me? But I will try and coax her to go."

Ned took the hand of the girl as they walked toward the river, and told of his dreams of what he would do when he should reach the state of manhood. She listened attentively for several moments, and then suddenly paused.

"Mother is calling me, and we must hurry back!"

CHAPTER XIV.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

NICK WHIFFLES sat in the front of his cabin, cleaning his rifle.

"It don't much need it, I swa'r!" he muttered, as he drew the greased rag through the barrel, and then squinted down the shining bore, "'cause only t'other day I done the same thing; but, then, as I hain't got anything better on hand, I'll do it by way of exercise."

He smiled to himself at his own conceit, as, having extracted the last speck of grimy powder from the piece, he began screwing it onto the stock again.

This done, he proceeded to screw the cap upon the ramrod.

"There's nothing like having everything in order, as my grandfather used to observe when he used to larrup us boys with his cane, so as to put us in a meditative mood."

"There!" he exclaimed, when everything was finished, "I reckon she'll do. Now I'll try it."

The pinch of powder was poured down the narrow bore, and then the bullet was rammed home. A cap was placed on the tube, and then he raised the piece as lovingly as though it were a sentient being capable of reciprocating his affection.

"Hello! yender is a squirrel a-settin' purty high up on that limb. Ef old Nick hasn't lost his cunning, he wouldn't want a better chance for barking you."

The piece was brought to his shoulder, and his eye ran along the barrel for an instant, when there was a sharp, not over-loud, explosion, and the tiny animal flew several inches above the limb upon which it was perched, and dropped like a chunk of wood to the ground.

The hunter, without stirring from the log upon which he was sitting, deliberately reloaded his piece, and then walked to where the squirrel was lying. Picking it up, he turned it over several times in his hand, and smiled as he saw there was not a wound upon it.

The unerring bullet had struck the bark directly beneath the belly of the animal, and sent up a shower with such violence as to fatally stun the creature, without breaking its skin.

"The piece is good, and Nick Whiffles's eye is still true. Here, Calamity, you've had your breakfast, but you can take this by way of a lunch."

With which, he tossed it to the pup standing at his side. As he did so, the capacious jaws of the dog opened, and it was cleverly caught between them. There was a crunching sound and the next minute it had disappeared down his gullet.

"There ain't much symptoms of your appetite failing, pup," remarked the hunter, as he turned toward the cabin. "I don't think you'll ever die that way."

Casting his eyes to the left, he saw his horse, Shagbark, lazily cropping the grass, the picture of contentment. Setting down his rifle just within the door, Nick proceeded to a large, old-fashioned box in the corner, which he opened with a rusty key that he carried about him.

Within were a number of bottles, a few Indian trinkets, and a bundle of clothes, that had belonged to a little child. There were the tiny shoes, the stockings, a handsome dress, apron, and linen.

Nick was thoughtful, and his usually jocund face was sad and downcast. He held up the articles to the light, and examined them with the tenderness of a parent who had buried her child, and was now looking over the relics left behind.

"Them garments was around Ned Hazel, when I found him floating in Elk River, in the canoe. I s'pose some mother has sewed 'em together, and if she's living, she is still shedding tears over the boy that has never come back to her again. I feel that I have done wrong in not finding the real owner of Ned. I did try, but all the time I was praying that I wouldn't l'arn any thing, and I didn't. I orter tried harder; much as I love the lad, there's somebody somewhere that's got a better claim to him than I have, and if the good Lord will guide me, he shall be give back to them that he belongs to. I love him, as much as his own father or mother kin—but I've no right to keep him in the woods, when a younker of his parts is sure to make his mark in the world."

More than once while communing in this style, he brushed the moisture from his eyes, and then he attentively studied some marks upon the linen.

These marks were simply the initials "E. M." and beyond question they were the initials of the boy who was known as Ned Hazel.

Nick Whiffles possessed little, if any, book-learning; but he was able to identify these.

"I s'pose they stand for the lad's name. E. might mean Ed or Ned, and that's why I called him so. What M means, I can't figure. I didn't take any name beginning with that letter, for fear I might hit his ginooine figure-head, and his owner get on the track. So, he had such a purty pair of hazel eyes, that I called him Ned Hazel. Hello, Calamity, what is it?" he exclaimed, starting up, as though detected in some guilty thing, as his dog bounded into the cabin, with a whine. "Some one coming, eh? I must keep 'em out of here."

Nick was generally self-possessed at the most trying times, but he was greatly embarrassed at this moment. Without placing back in the box the precious articles, he had been examining, he let them fall to the ground, and catching up his rifle, hurried to the outside.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, as he encountered the Phantom Princess, almost upon the very threshold, and feeling the obligations of hospi-

talities, he retreated a step or two, and invited her in.

"No," said she, halting where she stood, and seating herself upon the log that he had vacated only a few minutes before; "the day is pleasant, the sun warm, and I will sit here."

"Just as you please," said Nick, not a little relieved, as he seated himself beside her, but at a respectful distance; "you know my cabin is at your service, and I'll do any thing in the world fur ye."

"I believe it, Nick, and I have come to ask you to do the greatest service one being can do another."

"Out with it, then."

And Myra Bandman then proceeded, in a deliberate and almost emotionless voice to relate her story. My reader has already learned it, so that it need not be repeated here.

The hunter listened, without a word or exclamation, until she was through.

"And now," she added, in conclusion, "I will tell you what I want of you. Hugh has been condemned to death, and the only human being who can extricate him from his fate is you."

"You are a sort of princess," replied Nick, leaning upon his rifle, and looking down to the ground in his gravest manner; "haven't you got the power to free him?"

"I could if it wasn't for one thing. The building in which he is now lying is the *Death Lodge*. Any person who is placed there is condemned to death already, and it is a part of the Black-foot religion that he shall not escape. They would not loose him, even for me."

"Has any thing been tried on the critters?"

"Enough to know that neither he nor I can do any thing. He was the bearer of a message from Mr. Mackintosh to Woo-wol-na, our chief, and when I took the chief to the lodge, Hugh delivered it with all the impressiveness at his command, and then I added my counsel to let him go free, lest we should be visited with the vengeance of the Hudson Bay men; but all produced no effect upon Woo-wol-na; I had lured my husband on, and he had been captured and brought in. Coming as a prisoner, it is decided that he must die as a prisoner. Oh! how I have prayed, night and day, since then, but the most that I can do is to get the chief to postpone his death a few days."

"Does he know you're his wife?"

"No; I have not told him that."

"Why not?"

"It would only work ill; he would be put to death the moment they discovered that. Hugh knows it, and he has been careful to keep the secret to himself."

"What's your ijee?" continued Nick; "do you think I kin talk Woo-wol-na into the ijee of letting him go?"

"No one can do that; nothing less than a hundred armed men could do that."

"What do you think I kin do, then?"

"With the help of Heaven you must manage to release him by means of strategy. You have a wonderful cunning in such things; you have befriended many men in distress, and I have been told that more than once you have rescued prisoners, almost at the moment of death."

"I don't deny I've had a good streak of luck, in years past, in that sort of business; but this 'ere thing has a harder look than anything of the kind that I ever took hold of."

"Don't say, oh, my friend, that there is no hope!"

"I hain't said that; my principle is not to give up a chap, even arter his hair has been raised, and the critters are yelling arter him, I don't give up hope till a man has gone clean under, sure."

"Oh, what a relief your words are!" said Myra, rising to her feet and standing in front of him. "Will you do what you can, Nick, to befriend me?"

"I will!" was the firm and ready reply.

CHAPTER XV.

WILL HE SUCCEED?

NICK WHIFFLES now made Myra Bandman sit down upon the log again, while he questioned her freely and closely.

How was the prisoner guarded? Was there any one time more favorable than another to attempt a piece of strategy? Could the appearance of sudden, unexpected force accomplish it? Was Woo-wol-na to be frightened by any threats? Once outside the *Death Lodge*, how far must the prisoner go before reaching the shelter of the woods? Was there any reason to believe that the Blackfeet suspected that the Phantom Princess had any intention of befriending the man by action, as she has already done by word? Did any of them know that she had

gone to see him? Were her movements watched? And any of the red-skins manifested any disposition toward her, on account of the favorable words she had uttered? Did Miona, her daughter, know any thing of the identity of the captive? How long a respite was conceded to him?

Such, in substance, were the questions proposed by the trapper, and to them he received, in brief, the following answers:

There were always three fully-armed warriors, at least, guarding the approach to the Death Lodge, and it was by the permission of these sentinels that she herself had secured admission to him, none of them knowing the meaning of her interview with him. Beyond question, the most favorable time to befriend him was at night, as the cover of darkness was an advantage not to be compensated by any thing else. A sudden dash into the lodge by several men might succeed in getting the prisoner away before the alarm could become general; but several men were needed to accomplish this, and there was no time or means for procuring these.

Woo-wol-na was not to be intimidated by any threats, and all time spent in such attempts would be worse than thrown away. If by any possibility the outside of the Death Lodge could be reached by Bandman, he had only a short distance to run across the clearing to reach the forest, when, if the night was pretty dark, there was a chance of his getting away. It was hardly possible that any of the Blackfeet suspected the relation between Myra and her husband or that she had any real purpose of befriend- ing him. She was so accustomed to coming and going at will that no one would suspect her errand in going up Elk river, and she was satisfied that no one was watching her movements.

But the earnest efforts of Myra to befriend the hapless captive, she had every reason to believe, had won her the dislike of a number of the villagers. Woo-wol-na himself had given unmistakable evidence of his displeasure. Miona knew nothing at all about the matter. Should Bandman remain in the power of the Blackfeet, he could not possibly escape death more than three days longer at the furthest.

"Another thing," continued Nick, when these questions had all been proposed and answered: "have they got Hugh tied up?"

"I am sorry to say they have; he was left free until after I saw him, and then he was bound hand and foot."

"That's good; I'm glad to hear that," replied the trapper, emphatically; and noticing the look of surprise upon the face of the lady, he added, "I say it's good, because, if they've got him tied up, they ain't apt to watch him so close, and then we've got all the more chance to untie 'im."

"I do not see how that can be done," said Myra, "for no one can remain in the lodge long enough to unfasten his bonds, without attracting the notice of the sentinels."

Nick Whiffles smiled in his most benignant manner and pointed to Calamity, who was seated on his haunches in front of them.

"There's the animile that's done the thing a dozen times in his lifetime. Ef it hadn't been for him, I'd gone under long ago, when I was tied hand and foot by the Sioux, and when he slipped in between a half-dozen of the varmints, at night by the camp-fire, and chewed 'em loose."

The face of the Phantom Princess lit up with hope.

"Can it be possible? I never dreamed of such a thing. There are so many dogs in the village that yours could pass to and fro without alarming the Blackfeet. Then, when the cords were all unfastened, Hugh could make a dash out of the door, and, favored by God, he might escape."

"Hold on," said Nick, in whose head the scheme was beginning to take shape; "we must try and get the varmints away from the lodge, if only for a few seconds; if we can't do that, I don't see the first chance of Hugh giving 'em the slip."

The face of Myra saddened again, for the words of the trapper sorely disheartened her.

"You don't see how it can be done, but I think I do."

"Then everything is arranged," said she, brightening up again.

"No; it ain't," was the response; "arter it's all understood between us, then Hugh has got to get the hang of things; he's got to know what to do, and when to do it to the second, or it's all up with us. Can you see him again?"

"It is doubtful."

"If there's any other way of doing it, it will

be better. Do you know how to write?" suddenly asked Nick, turning his head toward his companion with such an earnest expression that she smiled, as she answered:

"Certainly."

"I'll get you a piece of bark, and you must scratch on it, with a sharp stone, that the pup has come to chew off his cords, and that the minute the animile comes out he's to follow him, and rush straight for the woods—can you do that?"

"Of course."

"Wal, then, I don't know but what we might as well be off, as we need all our time."

Nick rose to his feet, and with his rifle slung over his shoulder, started in the direction of the river, the lady and Calamity following him. He was so occupied with what she had told him, that he forgot to close the door of his cabin, and never once thought of the baby-clothes that he had left out, exposed to the view of any one who might chance to drop in during his absence.

As they walked along they kept up their conversation about the all-important matter. Nick showed no impertinent curiosity about the history of Myra and her husband; his whole mind was centered upon the task he had undertaken—that of freeing Hugh Bandman from his hapless captivity.

A general plan had already taken shape in his head, but as he meditated upon it, he saw more and more clearly the difficulties, that were so great as to be almost insurmountable. The Blackfeet were always vigilant, and the fact of Bandman being an inmate of Death Lodge shut out all hope of further reprieve or liberation.

Nick believed it possible that he might reach the wood, but the greatest danger was then, when the alarm should occur. The pursuit would be so quick and fierce, that in the moonlight discovery and recapture seemed inevitable.

This was the difficult point to be gotten over, and it was the one which gave him much concern, as he made his way through the wood, talking in an absent sort of way, with the hopeful, doubting, fearing woman, whose impatience constantly carried her ahead of both him and his fast-walking dog.

When the river was reached the canoe was gone. The Princess looked around somewhat impatiently, and then called the name of her daughter. The latter heard her, as I have shown, and instantly replied, while she and Ned Hazel made haste to return.

Soon the canoe was discerned rapidly crossing the stream, with the two in it, anxious to not keep them in waiting.

"Ned," said Nick, as the lad stepped ashore, "I shall be gone several days, and I want you to wait home for me."

"All right," was the cheery response.

The boat put off again, with the three in it, and Ned stood on the shore waving them a good-by, so long as they were in view; and then, when they disappeared from sight, he turned about and made his way toward his cabin-home.

CHAPTER XVI.

A WISE BRUTE.

HUGH BANDMAN was reclining upon the pile of buffalo-skins in the Death Lodge, his thoughts sad, depressed and solemn.

He knew that Myra, his beloved wife, had gone in quest of Nick Whiffles a couple of days before. He scarcely dared to hope, and yet life for many years had not been so precious to him as now. The long-lost wife, she toward whom his heart had yearned during the dark years that had dragged over his head, and who had never given him one loving thought, had lived to see the scales fall from her eyes, and turned to him now, with an affection deeper and more sanctified than that with which she viewed him during those few days, when she was his happy bride.

Yes; life was all sunshine and beauty, and he longed for it, with all the ardor and depth of his soul.

But he could see little cause for hope. He was bound and unable to help himself in the least. The Indians were vigilant and watchful, prepared to frustrate the first attempt to escape. He was condemned to death, and so far as he was concerned, he could not see how any human hand could save him.

"Well, let it come," he mused, with a sigh; "it is hard to be resigned, but I can die happy, if I can once more fold my darling wife and little daughter in my arms."

It was night, and the same flaring oil light burned near at hand, so that he could view the whole interior. Water and food had been abun-

dantly furnished him, so that he was suffering nothing physically.

More than once his eye had wandered over the sapling rafters, covered with bark and skins, wondering whether, if free, there was any ready means of reaching the outside; but it was easy to see that they were powerfully constructed, and if he were given the use of his arms, and a sharp knife, it would be the work of several hours to force his way out, and then he would be likely to fall into the hands of his captors, the moment he reached the outside.

But he had no means of loosing the bonds upon him—so that, if left alone, he knew he was sure to die.

"She has been gone two days, and she said she would be back to-night—for to-night decides my fate. 'Sh! was that a footstep?"

He raised his head and listened, but nothing reached his ears, except the mournful sighing of the night-wind through the forest outside.

The hour was late, and most of the Indians were asleep. Those who were awake were silent and vigilant. Living such an Ishmaelitic life as these Blackfeet led, they knew there was no moment when they were safe from attack by foes.

The dead of night was the favorite time of their own race for such forays, and at such times, therefore, a goodly number were on guard.

Bandman had slept very little for the past two days, and a heavy drowsiness began settling over him; and so, stretched out upon his bed of buffalo-ropes, he dropped off into a feverish, unrefreshing sleep.

Now and then he woke with a start, certain that he heard some one in the lodge, but after listening a moment, he became convinced that it was only fancy, and sunk off into slumber again.

But near midnight, he was awakened by a genuine visitor. Something cold rubbed his face, and starting up, he recognized a large, ill-favored dog standing over him, whining and rubbing his nose against his cheek.

"Get out!" gasped the startled prisoner, with a shudder of terror, supposing that one of the numerous Indian dogs had been allowed to come in.

But the creature refused to retire, and Bandman, nervous and feverish, was about to shout for some one to remove him, when he suddenly recollected that he belonged to Nick Whiffles!

At the same moment, he observed a piece of bark tied about his neck, and suspecting at once what it meant, he succeeded in loosening it with his hands, bound and cramped though his arms were.

The bark was thin and white, having been taken fresh from a sapling, and on the tender inner coating had been scratched some words, that now were well defined, owing to the darkening of the sap, where the letters had been traced. Bandman managed to read with little difficulty the following:

"This dog has been sent you by Nick Whiffles, who is near at hand to befriend you. The dog will gnaw your bonds asunder, and then pass out the Lodge; the next moment you are to do the same, and make a rush for the woods, where you will be met by Nick, who will do all he can to help you."

Hugh Bandman made certain that he had read and that he had understood every word upon the strip of bark; then he quietly tore it in pieces, and cast it from him.

This done, he looked about for the hero, Calamity, and saw the tip of his tail as he whisked out of the door.

"Has he deserted me?" asked the captive, with a sinking of the heart, but he had hardly uttered the words, when he comprehended the sagacity of the brute.

One of the Indians had seen that among the several dogs, playing about the lodge, was one that had entered. Suspecting nothing, however, he had walked to the door of the cabin, and looked in, out of curiosity, merely to see what was going on. As he did so, the dog shot by him into the open air again, and he saw the white man look up alarmedly at him, and then drop his gaze, as in sad reverie.

The Blackfoot stood a few minutes at the door, scrutinizing the interior of the Death Lodge. The light was burning brightly, and by it he saw no signs of any thing unusual. The top and sides were undisturbed, and from where he stood, he could see that the bonds of the prisoner were firm and secure as ever.

Everything being satisfactory, he turned and moved away.

It struck this same sentinel, that the dogs were unusually frisky that night, and that they

were very fond of frolicking in the neighborhood of the Death Lodge. He stood and watched them for a few minutes, and then turned away and joined his companions who were loitering near.

Scarcely was his back turned, when in went Calamity again. The sagacious brute went straight up to where the captive was lying, and, without any preliminaries, applied his sharp teeth to the thongs that bound his elbows, and in a twinkling they were free.

Then the thongs at the wrists followed suit. He was still fastened at the knees and ankles, and Calamity was about to attack these, when he seemed to change his mind, and out of the door he went again.

Bandman understood the meaning of this movement, and he took the hint at once.

Lying on his side, he took pains to keep his arms behind him in the same position, as before they were unfastened, and the better to deceive his foe, he kept his head lowered, and began nodding as though he was dropping off to sleep.

He heard the cautious footstep of the Indian, and he knew that he was standing at the door, and looking at him, but still the trapper did not raise his head.

In the utter silence which thus prevailed, Bandman was fearful that the savage would hear the throbbing of his heart, and would penetrate his calm exterior and see the tumult that agitated him.

Could it be that his suspicions were aroused? Had he been watching and seen the dog at work? Had the brute been outwitted by the greater brute of a man?

Such and similar were the questions that agitated the captive during these dreadful moments, when he knew that the burning eyes of the Indian were fixed upon him, not daring to guess what his next movement would be.

If the red-skin had actually detected the ruse that was being attempted, Hugh saw nothing but failure before him. True, his arms were free, and had he possessed a weapon he would have made a fight upon being approached by the dusky scoundrel; but he did not possess a knife, and could make no resistance at all.

But he waited and prayed that his enemy would move away and leave him alone, for he felt that he could not stand this searching scrutiny much longer.

The prayer was granted. His strained ears caught the soft rustle and heard the faint sound of footsteps as the Indian turned upon his heel and moved away. Raising his head, Bandman saw that he was alone again.

It seemed to the poor fellow that so much of the night had passed, that the morning—dawn of his last day—was close at hand. In reality it was only a little past midnight; but he was becoming so distressed and agitated that he felt he could not stand this suspense much longer.

Sh! here was Calamity again. Heaven's blessings upon the noble creature, and upon his noble master, who was risking so much for a comparative stranger.

As before, the dog proceeded to business without delay. A few vigorous clamps of his jaws, and the cords parted at the ankles; those at the knees quickly followed, and then Hugh Bandman was free.

Calamity stood a moment, looking straight into the face of the man whom he had benefited; then turned about and darted out of the door again.

The critical moment had come, and Hugh Bandman staggered toward the door, resolved to make one last grand struggle for life.

CHAPTER XVII.

RACING WITH A PHANTOM.

At this critical moment the three Blackfoot sentinels were standing together, just beyond the Death Lodge, talking of something that was quite interesting to all. Not one of the three had the remotest suspicion that any project was on foot looking to the rescue of their prisoner. Had they believed that any living person was thinking of such a thing, it is not to be supposed that all the cunning and skill of Nick Whiffles and his dog could have benefited Bandman in the least.

They were keeping watch because it was an invariable custom of the Blackfeet to do so under such circumstances, and then it was not impossible that the prisoner might release himself, although it was by no means probable that such thing could be done.

As I said, the three were conversing in this manner, when one of them suddenly discerned a bright, star-like point of light in the woods, and he called the attention of the others to it.

All three turned their heads and carefully

scrutinized it. It was small and glowing like a coal, and while they looked they could see that it was steadily increasing in size, showing that it was fire.

Furthermore, it was upon the ground, and was burning without noise, and seemingly without any human agency.

It was singular, to say the least, and all three Indians moved toward it. Reaching the point where it lay, they stooped and saw that it was a piece of excrescence, nearly spherical in shape, and commonly known as "punk." One of them kicked it about with his moccasin, and then the question was how did it come there, or rather how did it come to be fired?

There was something so curious in it that the three stood talking for a few minutes, and then they walked back again toward their station.

And just at this moment it entered the head of one of the dusky scoundrels that this burning point of light might have something to do with the prisoner in the Death Lodge.

With a muttered exclamation of anger, he ran to the door and looked in. The captive was not there!

For an instant the Blackfoot stood like one stupefied, and then he gave utterance to several dismal whoops, that sounded through the village, and awoke Woo-wol-na from his sleep.

Within five minutes a score of warriors, with the chief at their head, were running toward the sentinel, with the questions:

"What is the matter? What has happened?"

"The prisoner has escaped from the Death Lodge!" This was the alarming cry that went around.

With tomahawk in hand, the chief strode up to the one who had announced the catastrophe.

"Dog! how came he to get away?" he demanded, in thunderous tones.

"The Great Spirit helped him—"

"Thou liest, thou treacherous dog. Thou didst it! Die the death of a traitor!"

As the infuriated chief uttered the words, his tomahawk descended upon the skull of the doomed Indian, who sunk in his tracks and paid the fearful penalty of his remissness of duty.

In the hubbub and excitement Woo-wol-na did not lose his presence of mind. He knew that the fugitive could be at no great distance, and he gave orders for a dozen of his fleetest warriors to scatter and search the woods in every direction for him.

He suspected that the prisoner had outside help in making his escape, and he entered the Death Lodge himself and made a careful examination. The thongs lay upon the ground, and a glance showed that they had not been cut but gnawed in two.

He had given instructions to his men to bind the white man, so that he could not get his hands to his mouth, and he concluded at once that this precaution had been neglected and he had freed himself in this way.

The other two sentinels, dreading the displeasure of their chief, had taken care to scatter as soon as the alarm had spread, so that this means of information was taken from him.

His next inquiry was regarding the Phantom Princess. She had been seen by a number early in the evening; but, upon repairing to her lodge, both she and her daughter were missing!

His soul was filled with fury when he learned this, for he needed no stronger proof that it was through her connivance that the first and only victim had passed from this fated room without going to his death.

All inquiry could learn nothing further about her. No one had seen her within a few hours, and he had now only to rely upon his own cunning to frustrate her daring attempt to outwit him.

He stood for a moment in deep thought, and then he roused up ready to act.

Well aware of the marvelous skill of the Princess in the use of the oar, he concluded that it would be called into requisition upon the present occasion. Somewhere, therefore, at no great distance up the river, she was now, or soon would be, with her charge.

Striding from the lodge, Woo-wol-na made his way to the shore, where several canoes were always lying. He was accompanied by a half-dozen of his truest and tried warriors, and he still had strong hopes of success.

It was barely possible that the fugitives had gone down the stream; but as this course would have carried them further away from what must have been their destination, he did not believe that contingency probable enough to warrant any effort in that direction.

"Up-stream," said he, as he seated himself in the bow, "and row as best you can."

There were no "slouches" in the canoe, and

the boat fairly skimmed over the surface of the water.

The moon was as clear and powerful as upon the preceding night, and the Indian boat shot out directly in the center as though disdaining the current, which, in reality, was so slight as to cause scarcely any perceptible impediment.

For a half-mile the progress was continued in this manner, and then Woo-wol-na gave the word for the boat to turn nearer shore, where the stream flowed more slowly.

His reason for doing this was, in the windings of the river there were many places where there was quite deep shadow, of which he wished to avail himself. If the whites were upon the river, and should discern their pursuers, and should find there was danger of being overtaken, they could easily run in to shore, and so long as the darkness lasted could keep out of the way of all pursuers.

His wish, therefore, was to steal upon them, so as to intercept and prevent any such flank movement.

The Indians used their paddles with amazing strength and skill; nothing but the ripple of the water from the prow and the soft wash from their oars could be heard, as they glided along the shore with such swiftness.

On, on they pressed, their muscles seeming never to tire. Several miles were passed and still nothing was seen or heard of the fugitives. Woo-wol-na leaned forward over the prow, his eagle eye piercing the gloom ahead, on the lookout for the first indications of the parties for whom he was searching.

Ah! it would have gone ill with the Phantom Princess had she fallen into his power at this time.

His whole soul was aroused, and he was in that mood when helpless womanhood or youthful innocence would have appealed to his mercy in vain.

Fully a half-dozen miles were passed, and he still relaxed not his vigilance in the least.

"WOOH!"

He uttered the exclamation with such forceful suddenness that all the warriors stopped rowing on the instant. He explained by pointing ahead to where, near the center of the stream, and so far away as to be only dimly visible, the white canoe of the Phantom Princess was to be seen.

The next instant, the paddles were dipped deep, and the Indian canoe shot forward with a speed that seemed about to tear her in two. Great as was the skill of the woman, the chief was confident that his warriors could overtake her.

When Myra Bandman vanished so suddenly from the sight of the Hudson Bay trappers, who were pursuing her, it was only by one of her strokes no more skillful than the hundreds by which she kept beyond their reach all the time.

She was very close to the shore at the time, and growing weary of the race, she made a dexterous flirt of her paddles that sent the canoe under the overhanging undergrowth like a flash, where it was concealed from any who might be passing within a few feet.

But Woo-wol-na was familiar with her stratagems, and there was no danger of his being deceived by any of them. His purpose was to keep them in view until they had approached near enough to send several rifle-shots after them, by which he hoped at least to disable them as to render further flight useless.

They had gone some distance before the fugitives gave evidence of discovering their danger; then the race began in dead earnest.

As my readers are aware, the Phantom Princess carried her husband, daughter, Nick Whiffles and his dog, so that she was under such disadvantage that she could not call into play all her astonishing skill, and the race had not continued five minutes when it was evident that the Blackfeet were gaining quite rapidly.

Woo-wol-na was the first to see this, and he cheered his men to renewed exertions. They strained every muscle and gained faster and faster.

Just what the wary chief feared now took place. Instead of keeping in the middle of the river, where they were in plain view, the fugitives began making for the shore. With a howl of rage, the savage raised his rifle and fired. To his amazement it was answered from the canoe, and the bullet sung rather uncomfortably close to his own ear.

But the exertions of his men were not relaxed in the least. If possible they toiled the harder, and turned aside as if to head off the approach of the whites to land.

The distance was too great to accomplish any thing by this maneuver, and to the chagrin of the

Blackfeet, while they were watching the swan-like flight of the canoe, it flew under the shrubbery along shore and was lost to view.

But Woo-wol-na and his warriors had marked the point where it had disappeared, and they kept on straight toward it, shooting under the bushes only a few moments behind.

But there was no boat visible. It had vanished as suddenly as when pursued by the trappers.

But Woo-wol-na knew what this meant. The instant she had landed, the light boat had been caught up in the grasp of her friends, who would probably carry it half a mile and then launch it again.

Very well; if they could do that, so could he. Not hoping to overtake her in the woods, or to tell at what precise point she would embark again, the Blackfeet made a rapid but wide detour through the forest, and coming back to the river at a point fully a mile above.

Here it was placed in the water again, and they paused and listened.

Nothing of the other boat was to be heard.

"They will soon pass here!" said the chief; "we will wait for them."

Like a panther crouching under the bank and waiting for its victim, the five Indians lay in wait. Daylight broke and found them still there, but they waited, for Woo-wol-na knew that he was right, and his prey must sooner or later pass in front of him, where escape would be impossible.

Yes; he was right.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"ALL UP!"

The escape of Hugh Bandman from the Death Lodge of the Blackfeet was in accordance with the scheme of Nick Whiffles, and, as the reader has learned, succeeded perfectly.

I have shown you how well the pup Calamity performed his part, and how the prisoner followed him out at the very moment that he was directed to do so. Without looking to the right or left, he headed straight for the wood, where he was met by Nick, who whispered:

"Follow me, and don't make no noise."

The old trapper then headed toward the river, which was reached before the alarm of the Indians.

"I don't know how long they'll watch that burnin' punk," said he, as they paused on the edge of the river; "but it ain't likely they'll stay there long, and then there's a chance for a powerful diffikilty. Here we are!"

As the last exclamation was uttered, they came upon the white canoe, in which Myra and her daughter were seated. In that moment, terrible from its anxiety, husband and wife embraced, and mingled their tears.

But it was only for an instant, and while Miona was wondering what it all meant, they took their seats in the canoe and shoved out from shore, Myra, as a matter of course, handling the paddle.

The weight in the boat was more than it was intended to carry, and it sunk alarmingly low in the water; but it was too late to rectify any error, and the devoted wife now called all her energies into play.

They had not gone far, when Nick saw that another serious oversight had been committed. The oar which the lady held in her hand was the only one in the boat. They ought to have had two more, at least, for him and Hugh, by which the speed of the canoe could have been doubled. As it was, she insisted upon using it herself; so that they could do nothing but remain passive spectators.

"Do you think we shall be pursued?" asked Bandman, turning toward Nick, who was caressing Calamity, and praising him for the part he had performed.

"I don't think so—I know so," was the reply.

"It must be near morning, isn't it?"

"There be several good hours yet, in which we must do all we kin; do you know I feel mighty mean, to set here and see that woman use that paddle?"

"So do I, but how can we help it? But she will get tired of this after a while, and then she'll have to give us a chance—Hillo! what's that?"

"It is the alarm at the village; they've found out you're off, and now the fun will begin."

Precisely where the fun came in was more than the rest of the party could see. With the first sound of the commotion, the Phantom Princess increased the speed of the canoe to the highest point.

This, as has already been said, was far less than her ordinary speed, on account of the unusual weight in the canoe.

There was little said, for every member of the company was deeply impressed with the seriousness of the situation, and they felt that it was a time for deeds and not for talk.

When the lady had carried the canoe several miles, her husband insisted so strongly upon taking the paddle in hand that she consented, and he sent it forward with a speed fully equal to hers.

While this was going on, the watchful Nick was on the look-out for pursuers. He knew that while the Blackfoot warriors were scouring the woods in every direction, Woo-wol-na was too sharp to forget the river. He was sure to take that means of pursuit, and it behooved him to see that his friends were not stolen upon and recaptured.

Nick was feeling quite hopeful, when his heart gave one extra throb as he discerned a dark object far down the river which resembled a canoe. He scrutinized it several moments until there could no longer be any doubt, when he announced his discovery.

"The varmints are coming, sure."

"Let me take the paddle, then," said Myra, with some alarm, as she reached out her hand for it.

"No, wife," he replied, without checking his labor in the least; "you have wonderful skill, but your arm is not as strong as mine, and I can carry this boat forward with as much speed as you."

"Oh, Heaven favor us!" she prayed, as she covered up her face, as if to shut out the sight of those who, after being so many years her friends, she now regarded as her bitterest enemies.

Nick Whiffles was watching the coming canoe as a cat watches a mouse. It did not take him long to see that the Indians were coming up "hand-over-hand;" consequently there was no use in attempting to compete with them, when the result of the race was inevitable.

Certain of this, he said as much, and at his suggestion the canoe was headed toward shore. Seeing this, as has already been shown, the Blackfeet sent a spiteful shot after them.

"By gracious! that looks like business!" exclaimed Nick, as he sighted his gun in return. "I guess Woo-wol-na is in that boat, and he doesn't feel much like palaverin' over this matter. I wouldn't give much for the hair of any of us if they catch us."

It was Nick who fired the return shot that came so startlingly near the Indians. He had no expectation and no wish to strike the pursuers, but it struck him that it might serve to show them that, if it should come to a fight, there would be some of it done by both parties.

Reaching the shore, all sprung out at once, and Nick and Hugh caught up the boat by concert, and plunged into the woods with it.

Thus the suspicions of Woo-wol-na proved correct, for the fugitives were attempting the very stratagem of which I have spoken.

"We'll come back to the river about a half-mile," said Nick, thus unconsciously running into the very trap that had been set for them.

This was done, they reaching the river at just about that distance from the starting-point. Here the boat was launched, and they all took their seats in it again.

They remained concealed, not wishing to put out until they could gather some idea of the locale of their enemies. They listened and watched, but saw and heard nothing. Calamity made a short reconnaissance through the surrounding woods, but he gave no indications of learning any thing.

"It's beginning to get light in the east," said Bandman, who was quite impatient at the delay; "it seems to me we are losing very precious time."

"Go ahead," replied Nick, "but keep close to the shore, and be ready to dart under at any minute."

In this way they coasted along, until they had gone a good distance, and the sun was rising. Nick Whiffles had taken the paddle, and reaching a sharp point, he said:

"We'll go in here awhile, and make a few observations."

As he spoke, he shot round the point, and Calamity gave a low growl.

"What is it, pup?" asked his master, in alarm.

A wail went up from Myra, as Woo-wol-na's canoe suddenly shot out, less than a dozen yards distant, and made straight for them.

Nick Whiffles saw that it was all up, and he made no attempt to escape!

CHAPTER XIX.

MORE LIGHT.

YOUNG Ned Hazel was happy, as he left his friends on the edge of Elk river, and started through the woods for his home. He whistled and sung, for every thing looked bright and cheerful for him.

He was certain now that Miona was very little, if any, less than an angel, and that when he and she became old enough, they were intended by Heaven for each other.

"I love Nick," he mused, as he walked along, "but I am not going to spend my life as he does his, in the woods. There is a great world around me, and I must see it, and make my mark in it. I have got a father somewhere, and I begin to feel like getting acquainted with him."

He was full of dreams of a glorious future, and of the fortune he was going to carve for himself.

"I shall make Miona proud of me some day," he added with a glowing face. "I have grown to be a big boy, without knowing much of books, but I've the will and the brains, and I'll do it."

Ah! the enthusiasm of youth! if it could only follow us through manhood, down the slope of life, what wonders we might accomplish! What heroes all of us would be! what victories the historian would have to write opposite our names!

"Yes, sir—that's what I'm going to do—hello!"

The last exclamation was caused by the sight of a man, that came into view just in front of him. The lad paused a moment, and then, as he recognized Mr. Mackintosh, he bade him good-morning and walked toward him.

"I am looking for Nick Whiffles; I suppose you can direct me to his cabin?"

"Yes; it's close by, but you won't find him home."

"I am sorry about that," said Mackintosh, "for I have come on special business. What time to day will he be back?"

"Not to-day, nor to-morrow, unless it's very late to-morrow night."

The superintendent showed by his looks that he was greatly disappointed. He stood as if debating with himself.

"Come to the cabin with me, and wait there till he comes back."

Mackintosh accepted the invitation in an absent sort of way, and the two walked silently in the direction of the cabin. Reaching there, Ned entered first, and the first thing that attracted his eyes was the "baby-clothes" lying upon the ground.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, as he stooped down and picked them up, "Nick went off in such a hurry that he forgot to put them away."

"Let me see them, please," said Mackintosh, who was only a step or two behind; "these are the very articles about which I came to see Nick."

Ned passed them over to the visitor without thought. The latter held them to the light, turned very white, and trembled so that he sat down to keep from falling.

"Oh, Heaven!" he gasped, looking in a strange, wild way at the boy.

"What's the matter?" asked Ned, surprised and alarmed.

"Are these the garments that were around you when you were found?"

"So Nick says."

"Then you are my own darling long-lost boy!" exclaimed the overjoyed Mackintosh, as he threw his arms about the lad, weeping like a woman as he did so.

As for Ned, he felt so strange that he hardly knew what to do, but he was conscious of a new emotion of pleasure, and something like an instinctive love for his parent caused him to return the embrace, and to shed tears too.

There was silence for a few minutes, and then, as the boy released himself, he sat down and looked up in the face of his parent, his own countenance beaming with a heavenly delight.

"I am so glad that you are my father," he said; "tell me all about it."

"Ever since I saw you the other day, I have had a curious feeling about you. Your age, looks, and the account you gave of Nick Whiffles finding you, led me to think it possible you were my long-lost boy. The more I thought of it, the more determined did I become that Nick should give me an explanation of the matter, and that is why I have left my men and come to see him."

"How came I to be lost to you?"

"Ah! what a happy day awaits your mother!" continued Mackintosh, wiping the tears of joy from his eyes, and heedless of the question

of the lad. "What a handsome boy you have grown to be; how proud I am, and how proud she will be. Come here, and let meshake hands with you again."

At length the father grew more calm.

"Your mother is now in London, where I hope you and I will soon join her. Are you willing to go with me?"

"I am wild for the chance; and will you educate me?"

"Nothing that wealth and love can do for you shall be undone."

"I have been growing weary of this life; I only want to see Nick and bid him good-by. He will be willing for me to go."

"You were born in London, and your mother accompanied me to Fort Churchill, when you were about three years of age. In the spring, when the weather was as charming as it is now, she started with me on a ramble along the banks of the Saskatchewan. We remained there only a few days, when, with a party of friends, we came further South to Elk river, where we engaged in fishing for a couple of weeks."

"As there was sometimes danger from wild animals, we frequently anchored our canoe out in the river and slept in that. One night I was belated in returning to where I had left you and your mother. She was in such rugged health that I had little fear in leaving her alone for a time; but I was later than I intended in getting back, it being past midnight when I reached the shore where I had left her."

"I found her asleep on the bank, but you and the canoe were gone. I awoke her in some surprise to know what it meant. She was more amazed than I, for she had anchored out in the river, and lay down to sleep there, waiting for me to rouse her by calling to her."

"But the truth soon came out. Mary was a somnambulist, and in her sleep she had paddled ashore, and let the boat float down-stream with you in it."

"As may be supposed, we started, almost distracted, to hunt for you. That terrible search I can never forget. At the end of two days we found the canoe, but you were gone!"

"I concluded at once that you had waked up, and, without knowing your danger, had crawled over the side of the canoe and was drowned. Then we spent days in searching for your body, but failed, of course. Your mother clung to the belief that you had been stolen by some Indian, and to gratify her I continued the search."

"She clung to her belief for years, and it was only a short time ago that she gave you up and returned to England. I had so completely lost all hope, that even when I heard what you told me the other day, I was not convinced."

"What is my name?"

"Edward Mackintosh; Nick got the first part right."

"I have a canoe," said the boy; "let's go down the river and meet Nick."

This was agreed to, and they started off at once.

CHAPTER XX.

A STRANGE BARGAIN.

FOR one moment the group of fugitives in the white canoe sat dumb with despair, as they saw that escape was out of the question.

Myra Bandman covered her face, as if to shut out the dreadful scene; Miona sat paralyzed; Hugh reached out to take the rifle of the hunter.

"Let us die fighting!" he said, but Nick Whiffles drew back.

"None o' that: leave matters to me."

The Indian canoe headed straight toward them, and there would have been a collision had not Nick waved them off.

"Don't come any nigher!"

This command, extraordinary under the circumstances, was obeyed, and the Blackfoot boat halted a dozen feet distant. He then addressed himself directly to Woo-wol-na, speaking in the Indian tongue.

"What do you want?"

"They belong to us," replied the chief, referring to his companions; "we have come for them."

"No you want me?" he asked.

"You deserve death," said the sachem, in effect, "but years ago, when I and a few of my warriors were overwhelmed by the Shoshone, you fought by my side; Woo-wol-na has not forgotten that day, and on that account he will not harm his brother, the great hunter; but your companions belong to me, and I must have them."

"They are man and wife," said Nick, still using the Blackfoot tongue; "why do you wish to separate them?"

Stoical as was the Indian, it was plain to see

that he was surprised by this information, but it did not affect his resolution.

"He has been condemned to death; he has slept in the Death Lodge, and he must die."

"Is there no sacrifice we can offer that will answer for his life?"

Curiously enough, Woo-wol-na was struck with the question, and he consulted for several minutes with his warriors. Then with a peculiar expression, he turned back again.

"Is she his daughter?" he asked, pointing to Miona.

"She is."

"And they wish her to go with them?"

"They value her life like their own."

"Leave her with us, and the rest may go."

This remarkable proposition of course was understood by all except Bandman, to whom Nick explained it.

"No," he replied, indignantly, "we will die before we will desert our daughter, will we not, Myra?"

"A thousand times, yes," she added, pressing her darling child to her breast.

Nick Whiffles now displayed characteristic cunning. Waiting until the tumult had somewhat spent itself, he asked the mother:

"Why do they want the girl to stay?"

"The chief has a son, that he hopes to make a great warrior, and he always said Miona should be his wife."

The eyes of the old hunter sparkled.

"That's no likelihood then but what he'll take the best care of her, and suffer no one to abuse her?"

"Of course; that is what he is after."

"How old is the gal?"

"Only thirteen."

"S'pose I tell him you're willin' to leave her five years, and to give her leave to marry his son, if she chooses—will you do that?"

"Oh! how can I—"

"Hold on," interrupted Nick, rather sternly, "he's got the power to take you all, and by mighty! it's queer he don't do it. I think it's only his liking for me that hinders him. You've a chance to save yourself and husband by taking his offer, and you're a blamed fool if you don't do it."

"But, to desert her, Nick—think of it!"

"It's hard, I know, but I calculate, if the Lord's willing, to spend the next five years and more in the woods, and I'll promise to look after the gal. I'm the only white man that dare go into the Blackfoot village, and I'll do it, and when the five years come round you shall have yer darter, ef I have to lose my scalp in gettin' her. No red Injin 'll make a squaw of her."

"And what says my own precious Miona?"

"For your sake, mother, it is best. I shall be happier than you can imagine in doing it. I shall be always cheerful in the knowledge that I am not lost to you. I shall long for the five years to come round, for I know that Nick Whiffles will keep his word."

"I swow to gracious! but she's an angel!" exclaimed Nick Whiffles, as he drew his sleeve across his eyes. "I'm yer daddy for the next five years, fur sure!"

Nick now resumed his negotiations with Woo-wol-na, who at first rejected them; but he finally consented, and the agreement was made. She was to spend five years among the Blackfeet, and then, if she still desired to return to her friends, she should be free to do so.

This was a great falling off from the original purpose of the Blackfoot chief; but his friendship for Nick Whiffles had a powerful influence in the matter, and, like a true Indian, his secret intention was that, when five years were up, she should still remain with him and become his daughter-in-law, in spite of herself and everybody!

And equally, Nick Whiffles's intention was that she should never marry any Blackfoot—he had other purposes in view.

This arrangement was hardly completed, when Mackintosh and Ned Hazel made their appearance in their canoe. They had pursued their way leisurely down-stream, meeting them at this place.

Poor Ned was in consternation when he learned all that had been done, but while Miona was a heroine, he could be a hero. As he shook hands with her and bid her farewell, he whispered:

"Remember, I promise to come for you!"

His face, as well as his tone and words, told how deep was his feeling for the beautiful child of the woods.

"I shall expect you," she replied, fixing her dark eyes upon him, from which gleamed the light of pure, abiding love.

Then she was transferred to the other boat,

and the sad parting took place—a parting long to be remembered by every participant.

Nick Whiffles listened to the story of Mackintosh, and said, in his own characteristic manner:

"I'm glad as a man can be, but it's hard, by mighty! and I'm sorry, too!"

And the strong-hearted man, who never quailed in the face of danger, turned away and wept.

It was like robbing the parent bird of its nestling; or tearing from the sturdy oak the vine which had lovingly, through rains and storms, through sunny days and nights of sweet repose, clung to it for growth and protection.

Down the river floated the little cavalcade—Nick Whiffles on the lead. Was the old man so loth to part with Ned that he would not leave him? At the Portage to the English river the party "shored," and passed on foot, through the forest, over to the stream down which to float to Fort Churchill. And yet old Nick left them not. Down to the fort they dropped and Ned and Nick Whiffles passed its portals together, hand clasped in hand.

Great was the excitement and joy in the fort over the remarkable events which had transpired, and a general jollification took place, while the company's transport, lying at the little dock, was carefully fitted up for the three additional passengers.

The third day witnessed the departure. The white wings of the trim brig-rigged vessel were shaken out; and slowly she headed for the northward. On the dock stood Nick Whiffles, with bared head, waving his cap in adieu to his dear boy, whom the seas were to separate from him. Ned, standing on the after-deck, gazed upon, and signaled to the dear old man, until, down in the horizon, disappeared departed ones and those left behind.

"Miona is my only son, now!" murmured the old forester, as, leaving the dock, he dropped into his canoe, and soon was lost in the mazes of the grim forest around.

"The gal's got me round the heart-strings, an' when my boy comes ag'in, as he promised, she shall be thar to welcome him, or Nick Whiffles's skulp 'll be dryin' in a Blackfoot lodge!"

THE END.

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